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**A Critical Ethnographic Exploration of Cultural Dimensions in Social-Emotional Learning
and Wellness Methods with Immigrant and Refugee High School Youth.**

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A Critical Ethnographic Exploration of Cultural Dimensions in Social-Emotional Learning and Wellness Methods with Immigrant and Refugee High School Youth.

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This thesis critically examines the utilization of social emotional learning (SEL) interventions with immigrant and refugee youth in a culturally appropriate and effective manner. By employing an ethnographic methodology and thematic data analysis, participant observation and in-depth interviews are used to investigate the impact of SEL education and social-emotional wellbeing on the experiences of immigrant and refugee youth

Data collection for this research project was conducted in the United States, this research employed the observations from a SEL instructors and voluntary interview participants who had graduated from Oregon state's largest high school and an academic SEL program called RISE (Refugee & Immigrant Student Empowerment). This research is grounded in the understanding that immigrant and refugee youth face unique challenges as they navigate unfamiliar cultural and educational environments and investigates how SEL interventions can be geared to meet the specific needs of this population, taking into account their cultural backgrounds, experiences of resettlement and diverse identities.

Utilizing a critical ethnographic approach, the study explores the common practices within SEL implementation, and the cultural contexts of the students involved. It examines the role of culture, language, and identity in shaping the effectiveness of SEL practices, illuminating factors that intersect with the social and emotional development of immigrant and refugee youth.

Through direct observations of the SEL program RISE and in-depth interviews with immigrant and refugee youth, this research uncovers the nuances of implementing SEL education. It explores the perceptions, challenges, and opportunities associated with SEL, while also highlighting the voices and agency of the participants.

The findings of this study contribute to the field of education by providing insights into the cultural dimensions of SEL implementation. By critically examining the existing practices and proposing recommendations for improvement, this research aims to foster a deeper understanding of how to effectively support the social and emotional well-being of immigrant and refugee youth within the educational context and ultimately enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of SEL education.

Keywords: social-emotional learning, immigrant youth, refugee youth, immigrant students, refugee students, social-emotional competency, social-emotional wellness, cultural competency

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1. Introduction

I developed an interest in migration and education while working with an academic program for immigrant and refugee high school students that utilized social-emotional learning (SEL) in the United States (US). Since working with youth at this capacity in the US, and pursuing my Master's Degree in 'Education and Globalization' at the University of Oulu in Finland, I have become more convinced SEL in education is crucial for growing immigrant and refugee populations. I then began to wonder, 'How effective is the SEL approach with immigrant and refugee youth?', 'Are there any potential cultural concerns I should be aware of when using SEL as a Western educator?' and 'What are the ethical concerns of using SEL with this demographic?' By committing to a SEL approach while working with immigrant and refugee youth, I must explore the cultural and ethical dimensions of my work as a Western, white educator. My goal with this research topic is to contribute to research around immigrant and refugee youth, the use of SEL with this demographic and the cultural awareness Western, white educators need when working with immigrant and refugee students. Through my professional and academic experiences in the field in the US and Finland respectively, I see how this topic is relevant to countries that continue to experience global migration, such as the US and the greater Nordic region.

Historically the US has been built on migration and continues to be shaped by the evolving population. Rates of migration, where people migrate, reasons why people migrate, and countries of origin vary, these details are circumstantial and cannot be generalized. The US census data from 2013 reported that four million US residents were black immigrants, from the Caribbean or African countries, making up 1/4th of the immigrant population and 9% of the black population in the United States (Foner, 2016, 62). From 2009-2016 the US experienced a rise in asylum-seeking, unaccompanied minors crossing the US-Mexico border, documented by well over 242,000 cases (Blue, 2021, 4631). Similarly in 2015, the Nordics experienced high rates of migration, Sweden received 156,000 newcomers and Denmark 20,000, in which 30-40% were unaccompanied minors (Mock-Muñoz de Luna et al., 2020, 2). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that at the end of 2017 there were over 65 million people displaced globally due to civil conflict, war and natural disasters; all which can be classified as involuntary migration, a phenomenon which is expected to increase due to climate change (Becker, 2019, 2). In 2018, the UNHCR also reported approximately 138,000

unaccompanied minors in the world (Blue, 2021, 4631). The causation of migration, relief efforts, and trends warrant global attention, but my research intention is focusing on understanding and helping immigrant and refugee youth in their new countries.

There are many descriptor words for global migrants, such as, immigrant, refugee and asylum-seekers. The word migrant can describe someone arriving in a new country, or departing country of origin, voluntary or involuntary movement as well as a legal or illegal circumstance (Koser, 2007, 12). Immigrants can be legal or illegal and include people who aren't necessarily forced to leave their home country but desire to seek residence in a new country, whereas a refugee is at risk of being persecuted by their origin country on grounds of politics, race, religions, social affiliation or membership of political group (Frip, 2016, 114; Grey, 2015, 10). I will be using the terms immigrant and refugee because it is what most accurately describes the demographic I am working with, but I will also be using the terms 'newcomers' or 'newcomer youth' to easily summarize 'immigrant and refugee youth' for comprehensive reading purposes throughout my research.

My research investigates the cultural details and effects of educational programs that utilize SEL with immigrant and refugee youth in their new homes, and specifically how the students feel their culture was treated in these scenarios. SEL in education can be utilized through implementing intentional community and relationship building at the forefront of the educational experience, such as but not limited to, facilitating community-building activities, providing opportunities for students to voice their opinions and prioritizing social-emotional wellness (SEW). A desirable outcome of SEL is to create a positive association with the educational environment through a supportive community in which students are more likely to feel comfortable and thus more likely to do well academically. A leading objective of mine is to explore SEL in the educational environment with immigrant and refugee youth culturally in order to explore how useful and effective it is. The power dynamic between the Global North and Global South should not be ignored, thus I see it as imperative to investigate the use of SEL with immigrant and refugee youth (many students who will be from the Global South or East), especially if it is to be implemented in the Global North, by Western, (mostly) white, educators. I believe SEL is an educational tool towards creating social cohesion and can alle-

viate concerns in nations with a changing demographic of citizens. Therefore, I am exploring the cultural dimensions of SEL in this research, meaning its applicability, effectively and appropriateness with immigrant and refugee youth.

My interest in this topic and particular field is no doubt due to my previous history as a non-traditional educator in different capacities. I am entering this research project with a positionality I have built on a long journey in working with teenagers and education. My experience with the immigrant and refugee youth demographic and SEL instruction was extensive upon starting this research project. In the US I had experience volunteering and participating in SEL activities as a volunteer tutor with immigrant and refugee students for two years from 2016-2018. Then from 2018-2019 I had the opportunity to employ SEL tactics and original SEL-informed lesson plans in high school English classes in Burgas, Bulgaria with Bulgarian, Turkish and Roma students, as a Fulbright fellow. I returned to the US from 2019-2021 to work as a co-coordinator of an academic SEL program that exclusively served immigrant and refugee youth in an Oregon high school.

To determine SEL's applicability, effectiveness and appropriateness with immigrant and refugee youth, this research project is exploring reflections and accounts from immigrant and refugee young adults who have spent their teenage years in a SEL program throughout their high school experience. I am also including observations from myself as an researcher, participant and facilitator in the SEL program with these students, as well as incorporating review of applicable literature, to answer my research question. My research question is: **How can Social-Emotional Learning in education be culturally appropriate and effective with immigrant and refugee high school youth?** The purpose of this question is to explore how newcomer youth (immigrant and refugee teenagers) have experienced SEL programming in their place of education, facilitated in a Western culture. I wish to explore if there were cultural contradictions in the way SEL is facilitated in a Western environment with immigrant and refugee youth. For my research question I am using the term 'culturally appropriate' to suggest that the SEL material can be affirming of diverse individuals regardless of their background, but not to suggest that SEL can necessarily emulate the cultural norms of every indi-

vidual included. The research question is focusing on immigrant and refugee youth that are currently experiencing or have experienced SEL in high school.

My research project was conducted in the city of Portland, Oregon in the US. I have not included this distinction in my research question to avoid convoluting the research. The SEL program used in this research is not specific to Oregon high schools and thus I do not want to mislead the audience into thinking this is a common practice. In my Theoretical Framework I will present relevant literature and context regarding SEL philosophy and practices, and background on the immigrant and refugee demographic. My Methodology and Methods section will explain my chosen methodology of Critical Ethnography, details on the data collected from interviews and observations and my process of analyzing data through Thematic Analysis. Findings will include all my Findings from the two data set of observation and interviews, while Discussion will explain how relevant Findings are connected directly to my research question. Finally, implications, limitations, ethical considerations and credibility will be discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

In my theoretical framework I will discuss the concepts of SEL and the immigrant and refugee demographic. I will define SEL, the applicability of SEL in education, common critiques and culturally specific critique. I will also introduce the concept of transformative SEL and how SEL should be used with immigrant and refugee youth. To give context to the immigrant and refugee demographic, I will review mental health and wellness considerations for immigrant and refugee youth, while considering briefly, government policies, xenophobia and racism this groups experiences.

2.1 SEL defined and explained

SEL is a learning methodology and set of methods geared towards developing social-emotional wellness (SEW) or social-emotional competence (SEC) in a student or person (Lawson, 2019, 457-467). SEL refers directly to the methods, activities or curricula, while SEW/SEC is the goal to be reached. I will be exclusively utilizing the acronym SEL to refer to social-emotional learning, and while SEW/SEC are arguably interchangeable, which I will use to reference social-emotional wellness/competence.

SEL teaches a set of knowledge essential to developing life-skills which are fundamental to life effectiveness, such as managing behavior and emotions as well as handling relationships, and other work effectively (Ibarra, 2022, 3). SEL is also the process of learning how to set, pursue and achieve healthy goals and is an avenue in which students and adults can understand and manage their emotions (Biber, 2019, 27).

Development of SEL could be dated as far back as Plato, but it was not until the 1990's that SEL research began focusing on the school climate and gaining recognition, first in the United States and then the rest of the world (Osher et al., 2016, 645). Emerging in 1994, a group of scholars, educators and practitioners in the fields of psychology and education founded the non-profit 'Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning' (CASEL), which coined the term 'SEL' and began pioneering research-based SEL strategies across K-12 classrooms in the United States (Beaty, 2018, 68; Elias & Zin, 2006, 3; Ibarra, 2022, 3; Osher et

al., 2016, 646). In 1997 CASEL collaborators wrote ‘Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators’ which outlined SEL’s five core components as: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making and relationships skills. (ibid). There has also been influential evidence of significant long-term effects before the establishment of CASEL. In the 1960’s the landmark childhood education program, ‘The Perry Preschool Program’, held in the state of Michigan in the US, which was highly successful in exhibiting improvements in non-cognitive skills related to behavior and academic motivation, resulting in positive long-term effects on crime and employment (Jones, 2015, 2283). The ambitious purpose of CASEL today is to provide SEL as a crucial part of education backed by evidence-based programs within schools (Beaty, 2018, 69).

In understanding SEL it is wise to expand upon the five core components that nearly all scholars tribute SEL foundation (Beaty, 2018, 70; Durlak et.al, 2011, 406; Elias & Zin, 2009, 3; Esen-Aygun & Sahin-Taskin, 2018, 205; Frydenburg, 2021, 184; Ibarra, 2022, 3; Weissberg et.al, 2015, 6-7). The following image and list will give further explanation and definition to the five core components that many scholars tribute SEL foundation and how they translate into improvements in academic and life performance for the students:



Figure 1 ‘The 5 Core Components of SEL’

1. Self-awareness: the ability to identify and reflect on one's own emotions, recognize strengths in oneself and others, and develop a sense of self-efficacy and confidence. These skills aid the student in reaching school and life achievements.
2. Self-management: developing impulse control, stress management tactics, ability to build persistence, goal setting and motivation. The ability to control and reflect on personal emotions.
3. Social awareness: developing empathy and respect for other perspectives and opinions. Social awareness helps the student interpret, reason information about others' behaviors and social dynamics.
4. Relationship skills: cooperation skills, help seeking skills and communication skills. This helps the student recognize, establish and maintain positive relationships with other people.
5. Responsible decision-making: evaluation of personal and ethical responsibility. Decision making skills help a student behave responsibly in personal situations, school and community context.

SEL should equip students to be able to recognize and name their emotions, manage the intensity of such feelings, delay gratification, express identity, along with reducing stress. Such results are important for students to feel emotionally competent. In terms of academic achievement and success, the expected effects on students are improved motivation to learn, study habits, involvement in all learning, better self-management, and fewer anti-social behaviors, including fewer social conflicts (LaBelle, 2019, 4).

Attaching the SEL curricula or programs to the school environment is an important step to stimulate academic gains. Interpersonal and instructional supports in school produce better academic performance through creating safe and orderly environments (that students might not experience at home) and through caring teacher-student relationships that create a bond and commitment to school (Durlak et.al, 2011, 418). Learning goals and competencies can be used to set high expectations with additional support, instead of standards or strict assessment measures (Beaty, 2018, 70). With SEL, students learn to treat themselves with kindness when distressed and confronted by harmful negative dialogue or self-criticism in the face of aca-

ademic difficulties (Biber, 2019, 27). The capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively and establish positive relationships in life are beneficial competency that is essential for all students, and crucial to vulnerable at-risk communities (Elias & Zins, 2009, 1).

Effective SEL programming not only helps drive academic learning but also translates into social outcomes in normal life such as positive peer relationships, empathy and social engagement. While a gain in social and emotional skills reduces problematic behavior in schools, it can reduce serious problem behavior later in life such as drug use, violence and delinquency as well (LaBelle, 2019, 4). Speaking more long term, SEL can also improve physical health, has shown to improve citizenship, may be essential for specific career fields in the 21st century, and aids in lifelong success by reducing the risk of maladjustment, failed relationships, interpersonal violence, substance abuse, and unhappiness (Elias, 2009, 3).

SEL has a wide range of realistic manifestations, from school-wide policies to singular experiences. When using SEL as free-standing lessons, it can take the form of a daily, weekly or monthly routine check-in, community meetings, cooperative games, or making time for personal sharing or debrief of the social experience. A school-wide systemic approach invites and encourages collaboration among the adults (administration, parents, families, teachers) consistently with diverse languages and approaches while stimulating and creating space for better communication about students' needs, which can be in the form of parent and family nights, translation services for families or an increase in parent-teacher style conferences (Cressey, 2020, 199-200). A popular example of SEL is service-learning projects (such as volunteerism) that include the larger community. Service-learning can be used in SEL as a deliberate intervention to problematic behavior, instead of using disciplinary tactics like detention, students can be in charge of cleaning up the school or a recycling program (Wilczen-ski, 2014, 2). However in SEL, the most effective educators connect their content with the real experiences and emotional lives of their students, thereby increasing motivation and engagements by encouraging a personal investment in what the students are learning (Cressey, 2020, 201).

The peer-to-peer relationships are very important in SEL, as it is in the name (social), but this also includes the relationship between the student and the adult teachers and facilitators. Educators in SEL should foster a nurturing learning environment by creating a student-centered approach to teaching and learning. A nurturing learning environment includes practical (useful not just positive) praise that allows frequent student input and collaborative choices that contribute to student's individual empowerment and a sense of belonging (Ibarra, 2022, 7). These factors in the classroom increase student engagement in the learning material. Empowering a student more specifically can mean that the student has a choice in their learning and freedom to express themselves. Teachers can stimulate this empowerment process and a sense of community by, for example, giving students roles in the classroom, such as tech help, motivator (or 'cheerleader'), timekeeper, materials manager, influencer, as well as many others. When students feel important and essential in the classroom, they will also feel responsible in the classroom community and upholding the classroom culture (Ibarra, 2022, 10). In a SEL classroom, essentially teachers need to create a classroom where students know they are cared about (Yoder, 2014, 13). Teachers demonstrate care by asking student non-academic (but appropriate) questions, expressing concern when a student has a problem, providing own personal stories or anecdotes and allowing students to take risks and feel safe asking questions (Yoder, 2014, 13). Teacher social-emotional competence is a concern and necessity in the implementation of SEL curriculum. SEL requires not only a continuous investment in professional development by educators, but also time for practices such as mindfulness to improve and balance their own social-emotional needs without getting overwhelmed (Ibarra, 2022, 10).

While immigrant and refugee youth experience significant stressors during the migration and resettlement process, SEL has the potential to touch many areas of their lives easily through school and extracurricular programs. Youth who have difficulties with peer relationships are more at risk of academic and behavior problems that may carry into adulthood (Tsai, 2006, 286). Social supports and resources serve many functions for immigrant and refugee youth; reducing stress, maintaining health and achieving eventual self-sufficiency and wellbeing (Simich, 2005, 260). While there are clear benefits from SEL for all youth, it is important to approach SEL with cultural considerations if it is to be used with newcomer youth, a unique

demographic that requires an extra lens of informative care. Educators should be privy to that fact that development of an individual's psychological functioning is not created in a vacuum, totally independently, but is built on a process of social interactions, situations, socio-cultural and institutional context, which is crucial to working with this population. To help immigrant students gain literacy and social skills it is essential that the environment and instruction be inclusive of newcomer and minority cultures (Li, 2010, 132).

2.1.1 Critiques of SEL and Transformative SEL

A common and valid critique to SEL is that teachers are not meant to be therapists, do not have the proper training and cannot be expected to be mental health experts (Cressey, 2020, 201). SEL isn't meant to be therapy but normalization of social issues and emotions and is meant to be used as a philosophy (in addition to the methods), and more directly can be used as a replacement for discipline. For example, if using SEL with minority (immigrants, refugees or POC) students, the educators can reflect on their own inner biases and socialization and the possibility of how classroom curriculum or SEL instruction reinforces the social norms of the dominant culture (in this case the host country/mainstream culture). Using SEL methods is not about entering deep mental health issues and topics with students without proper training, but about creating a socially and psychologically safe learning environment for the students, one in which children can be comfortable learning to navigate social situations and are empowered to explore their identities (ibid). However, because school culture and the adult educators and administrators have so much power in the classroom to decide and control how the school environment is going to feel, it should not be assumed that the implementation of classic SEL procedures would automatically create a safe space for every student. When critically looking at SEL, it can serve to reinforce social norms of the dominant culture, and there is a need for exploration in SEL of cultural sensitivity, implicit bias and how to use SEL effectively with diverse groups of students (ibid).

New educators tend to focus on discipline and authority early in the classroom to establish control and order, but an alternative is an exploration of SEL and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) methods to co-create classroom culture and norms with the students, taking a democratic approach to authority instead of disciplinary, the educator is modeling long-term

responsibility and sociopolitical engagement (Cressey, 2020, 198). Research has demonstrated that a positive school climate leads to fewer student absences and conflicts among students as well as improved academic outcomes. (LaBelle, 2019, 4) For example, when enacting discipline and order, culturally responsive and SEL informed educators should refrain from ‘tone-policing’ and restricting how their students speak up and out about unfairness in the classroom (ibid). CRT is the concept of recognizing that socialization has led to implicit bias and that teaching methods and solutions (such as SEL) need to adapt and include this consideration. When educators overly focus on discipline and controlling student behavior it may be because the important cultural and social-emotional variables are not being considered well enough. If educators focus on helping the students develop autonomy, ethics and their own sense of self-discipline, this naturally creates an environment where mutual respect, group decision making and cooperation are the norm, which does the long-term work in place of discipline (Elias, 2006, 3). Classroom and behavior management is more complex when considering the role of privilege, culture, identity and power, and educators are in a unique position to promote empowerment, equity, inclusion and social justice through work with students and their communities (Cressey, 2020, 195-196).

During resettlement in a new country, immigrant and refugee populations have numerous disadvantages that may affect their integration process and health, such as, discrimination, stress, underemployment, poor housing, lack of access to services and lack of community or social support (Simich, 2005, 260). In the case of immigrant and refugee students' mental health, SEL is an appropriate solution, if done correctly, but what is the correct, culturally appropriate and sensitive way to use SEL? A part of SEL is to teach students how to appreciate and respect the opinions and perspectives of others (Durlak et.al, 2011, 406). This can apply to mainstream students and fellow newcomer students in the overall acceptance of diverse newcomers and curb xenophobia from the mainstream population early on. SEL aids the acceptance process of immigrant and refugee youth in a new country and encourages healthy peer-peer and peer-adult relationships (Greenberg et al., 2003, 466). Schools have an undeniable and essential role in cultivating and enforcing the socio-emotional development of youth, just as societies, communities and families operate with different values, schools do as well (ibid). The teachers and administrations attitudes, the school values and classroom climate determine how open and accepting a space is going to feel for immigrant and refugee stu-

dents. An integration of SEL methods can make any and all students feel more comfortable, but the cultural limits or sensitivities need to be explored when implementing SEL with diverse populations.

An important critique of SEL to note, applicable to mainstream and newcomer youth, is that SEL methods and programming are at risk of promoting assimilation and purely symbolic youth activism (Jagers, 2016, 2). From a young age students can feel and recognize unfairness, they can name and call out inequity and injustice. Exploring these thoughts and feelings and encouraging this skill and mindset is exceptionally important to students from historically marginalized groups (examples: race, language culture, sexual orientation, gender, disability, economic background). Specifically for disenfranchised youth (immigrant, refugee and POC or identity-minority youth), learning how to advocate for justice and speak out in a safe environment, such as their school or community, may be an important survival skill and strength essential for them in the future. The goals of SEL can be rendered ineffective, maybe even detrimental, if a teacher avoids discussing sociopolitical contexts of teaching and learning (Cressey, 2020, 197-202). Arguably, all behavior is perceived through a socio-cultural context. Without a culturally responsive mindset, teachers may be quick to use teaching practices that modify a student's behavior to reinforce a desired replacement behavior, these types of teaching techniques and interventions can disempower and disenfranchise already marginalized students into obedience and complacency to the dominant host country (Cressey, 2020, 204-205).

Thus, the social-emotional competencies are not only for the students but the educators as well, teachers with no social-emotional competence will more likely have issues with classroom management, resulting in negative classroom experiences for students and adults, burn-out and a negative school climate (Ibarra, 2022, 6). In response to concerns of SEC of educators and the potential of SEL to enforce a dominant structure of power and inflict the cultural biases of the dominant culture, the new concept of transformative SEL has been developed to spearhead equity and social justice in these specific educational environments (Cressey, 2020, 201). Transformative SEL includes CRT, collective action and student empowerment, while advocating for a focus on mindfulness and reflective practices and addressing implicit biases

and triggers for educators (Cressey, 2020, 202). Educators cannot remove their identities, positionality and biases at the door of the classroom. Rather than pretending to be objective or neutral, educators need time to think, talk, write and reflect actively on their background and beliefs in their training practices (Cressey, 2020, 204).

Transformative SEL does not only apply to the classroom and is not only the teacher's responsibility but should include a school-wide examination. For example, survival skills that youth may have developed in refugee camps are not necessarily priorities to try and understand or tolerate in other educational settings (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009, 418). Engaging in physical violence to protect oneself against bullying or worse may have been a survival skill some youths have had to develop, yet schools with zero tolerance policies which will result in suspension and expulsion for immigrant and refugee youth (ibid). This is not to imply that violence or aggression should be tolerated but there needs to be an awareness of the cultural and circumstantial differences some students are trying to manage. In addition to individual threats, many people from marginalized backgrounds have also experienced systemic and governmental abuse or threats as well (Ellis et al. 2011, 70). Engaging in SEL and developing SEC can help all students, including those beginning to exhibit negative behaviors, and those with existing significant behavioral problems (Elias, 2006, 2). Youth learning how to express anger and outrage is an important part of sociopolitical engagement and learning about injustices. Additionally, resistance and thinking critically are a protective factor for these students and communities to learn in the form of self-advocacy in order to survive (Cressey, 2020, 205-206). When using SEL with students, it is a unique opportunity to navigate resistance to oppression and collective well-being for marginalized groups in a healthy way, educators have the power to promote equity, social justice, empowerment and inclusion through their instruction with students and families (Cressey, 2020, 196; Jagers, 2016, 2).

Transformative SEL is the adaptable, culturally appropriate lens in which to implement SEL for educators working with immigrant and refugee youth. SEL in which the students' cultural values and strengths are recognized, where content can connect itself to collaborative discussion, and curriculum can include the incorporation of diverse perspectives and ideas (Cressey, 2020, 199). While discussing CRT and transformative SEL, Cressey (2020) poses a critical

question for educators and schools working with immigrant and refugee youth and attempting SEL, “Can we promote social-emotional skills of learning to follow rules and procedures while at the same time teaching students how to resist injustice, speak truth to power and recognize when the context calls for disobedience?” (216). Cressey (2020) continues to imply that both skills are needed to help students become well-rounded, participatory citizens in democratic states, and concludes that there is a need for more research that explores the foundations and practices of an integrated approach of SEL and CRT (216). It is important that the implications of using SEL be clear while working with historically disenfranchised or marginalized youth (immigrants, refugees, POC or identity-minorities), to positively uplift these diverse groups and their contributions to the collective wellbeing of community, the school, and globally (Jagers, 2016, 3).

2.1.2 SEL applicability with immigrant/refugee youth

The use of SEL in academic environments may be a crucial piece to the overall solution of more adequately providing mental health and wellness to immigrant and refugee youth because there are many barriers to accessing services through traditional means. Newcomer populations have limited access to formal support services due to limited language, lack of awareness, social isolation, misinformation/inadequate information, fragile immigration status, racism/xenophobia, and bureaucratic processes (Beiser, 2008, 143). Families also may be more concerned with securing more urgent tangible needs such as food, housing and income, rather than spending time, energy and funds on services that are not seen as basic needs such as mental health (Ellis, 2011, 72). Yet, concerns such as difficulties in school are easily identifiable and typically more acceptable targets for additional programs and services rather than mental health issues. Families often will view academic achievement as desirable and value services associated with school success (Ellis et al., 2008, 73).

Immigrant and refugee youth have reported feeling that school and learning materials were not connected to their culture, experiences and previous lives (Li, 2010, 128). Their culture may have been excluded or even spoken about negatively by teachers (*ibid*). Curriculum should include diverse representations and references to include many cultures of different types and groups of people, some of which may be the students and communities of the im-

migrant and refugee students, without necessarily spotlighting or ‘studying’ specific groups as an outsider (Cressey, 2020, 198). Developing linguistic skills and competencies is a necessary part of integration and adaptation for immigrant and refugee youth but schools have historically been focused on teaching the national language as fast as possible instead of naturally and thus created a segregation within school (Tsai, 2006, 285). In school, formation of student and social circles needs to be understood within the larger macro sociocultural context of the experience (ibid). Students learning the mainstream language are often separated from mainstream students and classes, this separation fails to create a natural speaking environment for the learners in the form of spontaneous interactive peer interactions and they are likely to experience socially isolated and increased psychologically derived fear from peer separation (Li, 2010, 128-131). This separation subjects students to different treatment, instructions and assessment which reflects and enforces a natural unfair separation in society (ibid). A diversified curricula would provide cultural ‘mirrors’ and ‘windows’ and includes counter-narrative for the students to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the themes in the content. Including the other cultures who are in the room, their stories and histories in the curriculum, but not acting as an expert on such cultures. Connecting the lessons and academic content to the students' lives also helps their engagement and motivation to learn (Cressey, 2020, 198). Language acquisition is effective in a natural, spontaneous and social learning environment interacting amongst peers (Li, 2010, 131). SEL programs and school curriculum in general can incorporate diverse perspectives and ideas in all content areas.

Direct intervention in psychological determinants of learning have been promising actions of reform, which supports providing SEL in schools to students at-risk (Elias, 2009, 1; Wang et al., 1997, 210). In addition to personal growth and academic achievement for why SEL programming provides positive outcomes to individuals, findings also indicate that SEL is important at a systemic and environmental level (Greenberg et al., 2003, 471). Depending on a school's concerns, needs and issues they wish to address, SEL can be a wide scale policy solution. All students, including those native to the host country, can benefit from social emotional instruction, such students (of any background) displaying significant personal problems, experiencing academic barriers and engaging in negative social behaviors (Elias, 2006, 2). Youth who suffer from feeling inadequate and lack close relationships with family, school or community are more at risk to seek and fulfill their needs for belonging from gangs and other

potentially dangerous groups (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009, 425). Implementing SEL at different levels throughout a school that has academic or mental health concerns will likely be beneficial to many of the students, but implementing SEL in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner with immigrant and refugee youth should not be overlooked.

The SEL field has garnered a lot of interest from players invested in improving health and wellness outcomes for children and youth from diverse backgrounds (Jagers, 2016, 1). In education, a transformational justice approach to discipline is a focus on repairing harm done in relationships and between people, instead of placing blame and punishment on students. Alternative forms of discipline and punishment are difficult to navigate in education, as traditional disciplinary practices of punishment are already firmly in place in many societies. According to Hopkins (2022), “This approach to conflict resolution challenges many notions deeply embedded in Western society, and enacted in many homes, schools and institutions. These notions include the ideas that misbehavior should be punished, and that the threat of punishment is required to ensure that potential wrongdoers comply with society's rules” (144). This is why it is imperative to explore and be clear about the implications of alternative approaches with youth from historically marginalized, disenfranchised, and under-resources backgrounds (Jagers, 2016, 3). While SEL is recommended for all students, minority, marginalized and disenfranchised groups have an additional benefit if SEL is culturally specific and aware of their history and situation, in identifying and resisting oppression. As Jagers (2016) describes, “Resistance can lead to freedom, to determine, pursue, and attain collective economic, educational, and health-related well-being” (2). This quote from Jagers (2016), implies a long-term effect of empowerment and well-being rather than temporary enforcement of rule-following behavior.

To summarize, SEL services for immigrant and refugee youth must be developed mindful of the history and experience of refugees (Ellis, 2011, 70). There are many ways of learning, some students are taught to learn ‘effectively’ by attentive, passive listening, participating in dictation or in reading a text individually. But there are also many who enjoy and benefit from active styles of learning. Multiple learning styles and ways of engaging with the content being present in the classroom will expose how the students learn. Different cultural ways of know-

ing and learning can include writing tasks, verbal or visual presentations, cooperative learning or inquiry-based discussions (Cressey, 2020, 198). Students may possess strength in any of these different styles of learning. In addition for educators to aid in students' development of sense of belonging, teachers themselves need to be socially competent enough to create this prosocial learning climate and utilize conducive instructional practices (Ibarra, 2022, 6). Well-meaning educators often lower their expectations for certain students, based on the educators' perception of the students' limitations, without realizing these lowered expectations are tied to teachers implicit or unconscious biases of these students. These implicit and unconscious biases may be developed from socialization and misinformation about working with students of color or with students of differing abilities. Though the educators are well-intentioned, the student does not necessarily need lowered expectations but appropriate accommodation, scaffolding and extra support to reach expectations (Cressey, 2020, 198). Setting high expectations for these students and helping to facilitate the process to build their skills and reach these goals helps the inclusion of the students, their self-esteem and belief in themselves. Social awareness in students and adult educators alike can be described as the ability to recognize social and cultural norms, and SEL programming and curriculum can be a natural way to invoke this exchange in the classroom by collaborative discussion and incorporation of diverse perspectives in the classroom content (Cressey, 2020, 199; Osher et al., 2016, 664).

2.2 Exploring the Immigrant and Refugee Demographic

This this section I will provide a brief description of some of the challenges the immigrant and refugee population face during resettlement and accessing mental health services. I will review the topics of acculturation and resiliency specific to immigrant and refugee youth, as two common phenomena in the resettlement process, and briefly describe racism and xenophobia. I would like to note that I am reporting on these topics from the perspective of a white, Westerner through literature review. I recognize that these topics are more nuanced and multi-faceted that I can understand or give justice to, but it is imperative to address in this research.

2.2.1 Mental health and wellness of immigrant/refugee youth

Refugee communities are rarely able to access adequate health services, especially youth who are in need (Simich, 2005, 263). In addition to some hurdles already mentioned previously, difficulties also include distrust of agencies, cultural barriers, privacy issues, stigma, family dynamics, bureaucracy surrounding status/eligibility, and misunderstanding on the part of domestic staff (ibid). A distrust of the system and authority may not only be due to unfamiliarity and cultural stigma, but also be in part due to previous experiences, perceived or actual racism and xenophobia. Mental health promotion among immigrant and refugee youth requires an integrated approach to overcome existing hurdles (Ellis, 2011, 69).

Accessing mental health services tends to be difficult because of the lack of culturally appropriate services. Beyond language considerations, cultural inclusiveness and appropriateness varies depending on the community and culture (Ellis, 2011, 71). Mental health services are specific because they require a certain level of language fluency both for the child and parents, and though newcomer youth develop quickly, full proficiency takes years (ibid). Even if services are linguistically capable and culturally aware, students also arrive with varying levels in education and literacy in their native languages (ibid). Literature has shown that additional solutions and models to address issues of engagement are needed to critically further develop the field of refugee youth and mental health (Ellis, 2011, 81). Immigrant and refugee communities are more likely to access services (such as mental health) through 'gate-way providers' which would include other parents, community members, teachers, or primary care physicians (Stiffman et al., 2004, 190). This is why mental health services for youth will be more accessible if built on a broad platform of community, services systems, and youth engagement.

Newcomers may have existing social circles when arriving in a new country, but many usually need to rebuild a disrupted social network. Many are without the social support they were accustomed to in their own country and at risk of social isolation (Simich, 2005, 260). Common informal social support is friends, relatives and neighbors who can be from the same ethnic groups (Simich, 2005, 262). Friendships are a primary source of social support for immigrant and refugee youth and are associated with psychosocial and mental health development (Tsai, 2006, 295). For young adults and the larger community, social networks provide

companionships, cultural identification, access to resources and social mobility (ibid). The importance of these informal social sources of support does not rescind the government's responsibility to provide adequate formal services and effectively strive for equitable access to health care and social services. Social support is necessary for individuals to cope with immediate and sustained crisis situations and improves self confidence that helps manage the ongoing challenges during adaptation (Simich, 2005, 260). Adolescents with both immigrant and host society origin, the support of classmates and teachers has proven to be an important source of protection against mental ill health. (Oppedal et al., 2004, 482)

The informal support newcomers receive from peers is not only informal emotional support where it is needed, it also leads to professional and ethnic-specific connections and resettlement (Beiser, 2008, 139), Widening and strengthening social networks increases diversity of contacts, interactions and information, exposing them to further resources available (ibid). For students, pro-social and intercultural peer programs and relationships are emotional protective factors in the resettlement process (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009, 421). Additional protective factors for immigrant and refugee youth are positive relationships with both mainstream and language teachers, counsellors, and other adults working in school resources (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009, 422). Using non-stigmatized services such as schools to engage the immigrant and refugees' community in seeking resources and services is a promising strategy that leads to further developing partnerships among providers and the community and integrating services (Ellis, 2011, 72). SEL programs need to not only support the student but also reach out to the greater community and build connections with the families (Ellis, 2011, 70). Social awareness involves recognizing social and cultural norms, being empathetic towards others and understanding support systems and resources available for assistance (Ibarra, 2022, p. 3-4; Osher et al., 2016, 646).

2.2.2 Acculturation and Resiliency

Amongst the multiple variables of the resettlement process for immigrant and refugee communities, including family stability and economic status, two concepts important for youth specifically are acculturation and resiliency (Rossiter, 2009, 412). Acculturation is a cultural identity process of learning how to orientate oneself between the host society and home herit-

age; a common process for first generation immigrants and refugees (Schwartz et al., 2013, 156). Successful acculturation is if the student has achieved sociocultural competence in one's own ethnic group and the environment of the mainstream society, a balance of supportive communication from the two is important for development (Oppedal et al., 2004, 489). In addition to acculturation, developing resiliency is crucial to resettlement for immigrant and refugee youth. Resiliency is a term to describe successful adaptation despite many challenges and the ability to confront obstacles and is the ability to have some control over negative behaviors that stress and adversity might cause (Bernard, 1995, 4). Resiliency is often included in the field of education and psychology while considering students development, and there is strong evidence that influences outside of the individual, such as other people, have a strong impact on the process (LaBelle, 2019, 1-2). SEL programs have shown to provide effective intervention for youth in school settings and foster positive social and emotional development while also enhancing resiliency (ibid).

Acculturation literature usually focuses on the direct relationship between acculturation and mental health, rather than the mechanisms that are a part of acculturation; processes which are mediated through social and personal variables such as social support (Oppedal et al., 2004, 492). Success acculturation is dependent on the balance between retention of home culture, integration with the host country's mainstream society and developing social competencies (ibid). Social competence in the host country and culture develops for immigrant and refugee adolescents by increased connection with extra-familial peers and adults within own ethnic and host society contexts. Acquisition of social competence in youth can serve long-term goals and outcomes for the students' lives and influence over developmental factors in their new home country (Jones, 2015, 2289). These social connections and competencies are sources of individual identity exploration and new cultural knowledge and skills (Oppedal et al., 2004, 481-482). Social connections and support help individuals cope with stress, in immediate crisis situations and build self-confidence needed to manage challenges in the adaptation process. (Simich, 2005, 260). Though connections and social support from the students own ethnic communities are important, the development of host country specific competencies plays a role as mediator and moderator in acculturation, as well as eases difficulties in accessing more social support networks (Oppedal et al., 2004, 489).

Migration and the process of acculturation are experiences that can affect youth negatively due to many variables, but findings in psychological adaptation of adolescents do not always find an increase in low self-esteem or ill health, overall conclusions are these adolescents can adapt just as well and as healthy as host counterparts (Oppedal et al., 2004, 481). Immigrant and refugee students can develop self-esteem and confidence despite hardships. Self-esteem is an outcome of psychological well-being; however, self-esteem plays a role in mediating mental health interactions with socioenvironmental experiences and individual characteristics, thus works cyclically. Youth who lack close relationships or bear feelings of failure and inadequacy can be targets for negative groups and activities that offer feelings of belonging and self-esteem (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009, 425). The support from both family and friends are both important for positive psychological adaptation, less family and friend support correlates with less host country and ethnic competence and overall yield strong negative effects on mental health (Oppedal et al., 2004, 490).

As youth learn their new language and potentially acculturate, the intergenerational gap grows (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009, 416). Youth often find themselves between the host and home cultures of conflicting values systems and less able to relate and please older generations in their families and back home (ibid). Necessary protective factors in these cases are community groups of support, such as religious activities with faith communities and cultural organizations (Rossiter, 2009, 422). There needs to be options for immigrant and refugee youth and community members to be able to keep participating in their culture and their beliefs even in a new environment. To feel rejected by one's own heritage or the host cultural communities, or both, would further marginalize an already marginalized group and invoke a cultural identity confusion for the individual (Schwartz et al., 2013, 162). To re-build friendships and social networks after arriving in a new country is imperative for immigrant and refugee youth because the difficulties involved in resettlement can threaten their psychosocial development (Tsai, 2006, 262).

Ideally the public sector in host countries could implement practical cultural competencies (such as translation/interpretation at all service levels), better coordination of information and an increase in referral services for more seamless mental health wellness support. But the in-

evitable accessibility gap due to lack of awareness of existing services for newcomers can be alleviated by mainstream contact points (health centers, schools, libraries, community centers) providing effective, useful and recommended cultural programs (Simich, 2005, 265). Social networks are sources of empowerment, social integration, network building, sharing relative experiences, problem solving and reducing stress, all contributing to positive mental health (Simich, 2005, 260). Social support within an ethnic group are psychosocial protective factors when combatting racism and xenophobia, particularly in the resettlement phase and youth with a sense of cultural identity and belonging are less at-risk than those without (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009, 421 Tsai, 2006, 295).

This is not to assume that the increased number of social networks and support will alleviate all concerns the immigrant and refugee demographic has during the re-settlement process. Especially systemic barriers such as language, inequality and racism will be consistent for many minority groups. The presence of social networks and supports has promise in building an individual's healthy emotional foundation while immigrant and refugee youth navigate acculturation, gain resiliency and grow into their new communities.

2.2.3 Racism and xenophobia

It is relevant to mention concerns of racism and xenophobia the immigrant and refugee demographic faces when immigrating to a new country. Though these topics are woven throughout the literature consistently, this dimension of the immigrant and refugee experience must be mentioned directly. It would be irresponsible as a researcher to not confront the realities of the topic directly and how it relates to the immigrant and refugee youths' experiences in the educational environment.

Despite successes in public politics, entertainment, business and education, research on minorities communities in the US highlights inequities in criminal justice, educational, economic and health-related sectors (Jagers, 2016, 1). Perceived and experienced discrimination, racism and xenophobia while seeking formal, systemic support is a consistent reason why immigrant and refugees turn to familiar and ethnocultural community support in initial stages of

resettlement (Beiser, 2008, 139). Sticking to an ethnically specific group of peers is an easy coping strategy response to stress and particularly a response to the environmental stressor of racism in a racially mixed environment (Lee, 2001, 62; Tsai, 2006, 293). The role of teachers as sources of support and role models in the acculturation process for immigrant youth is not straight forward. This support network in particular is mobilized when students are experiencing burdens of strain, on the other hand, some teachers can be sources of institutionalized discrimination (Oppedal et al., 2004, 490).

Educators play a role in the disproportionality of outcomes based on race, gender and disability, for example separate special education placements, suspension, expulsion, law enforcement referrals, discipline and seclusion (Cressey, 2020, 198). Implicit bias is a player in inequitable outcomes, and educators can make it a priority to work against disproportionality (through structure protocols, policies and data) that exists in schools and society (ibid). A part of the resettlement and migration experience for some refugees often includes an abuse of power by authority in their own country or host country, and cases varying on extremity (Ellis et al., 2011, 70). The socioeconomic position of immigrant parents and the position of segregation in the form of language learning for immigrant students mirrors one another, these separations exist in schools and society, this comparison shows how schools perpetuate the elusion and discrimination to reproduce social inequality (Li, 2010, 132). Segregation of immigrant and refugee students in schools based on language abilities is a representation of how in society an amount of segregation is seen as acceptable. Experiencing discrimination and marginalization in school are detrimental to psychological development of students (Oppedal et al., 2004, 481).

Racism and xenophobia exist historically and systemically in Western countries such as the US, it is important for educators to remember this when working with a minority group and understand the ways in which a school could reflect inequalities. The recognition of this history and reality into curriculum and structure makes a more equal educational experience for all students.

3. Methodology & Methods of Research

From the Theoretical Framework, I was able to establish how SEL can be used in a culturally appropriate manner and assert why SEL may be necessary for immigrant and refugee youth's resettlement process. From the literature context, SEL appears to be culturally appropriate to use with immigrant and refugee youth when it is employed with curriculum that includes diverse perspectives, when educators intentionally reflect on their own biases, and when extra supports and flexible discipline is in place to support students with different learning needs. This population of students also may benefit from SEL because of the stressors of resettlement. The Theoretical Framework relates to my research question by illuminating areas of concern in already existing SEL, with the immigrant and refugee demographic in mind, and by providing solutions in making SEL culturally adaptive and inclusive. To further answer my research question, I propose contrasting my theoretical conclusions with an empirical study. This study implements an ethnographical research design to explore the cultural dimensions of SEL and SEW with immigrant and refugee youth by sharing the students' stories and reflections of their time in an SEL program and observations on the adult facilitators' role in SEL programs.

This research implements a critical ethnographical research design to explore the cultural dimensions of SEL with immigrant and refugee students through the literature and empirical data to determine whether SEL is culturally adaptable and appropriate for this demographic of youth. This chapter will describe what critical ethnography is, highlight the philosophical roots upon which ethnographic research is founded, as well as the methods and steps that were employed to collect data. A rationale for the applicability of the critical ethnographical approach to my research question will be described and a detailed breakdown of the research procedure will be presented (including program details, participants, data collection and data analysis). I will also speak of my subjective stance and the implemented measures to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study. Finally, ethical considerations will be discussed.

3.1 Methodology: Critical Ethnography

Critical Ethnography is an approach to ethnographic research that implies an ethical responsibility to address the wider systemic and social injustices and unfairness that exist (Madison, 2012, 5-7). I have used D. Soyini Madison's (2012) definition of ethical responsibility as "a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on principles of human freedom and well-being" to frame my understanding of ethical responsibility when using Critical Ethnography (5). Originally, I was drawn towards implementing an ethnographic methodology because traditionally ethnography is used to study people and cultures, ethnography allows the researcher to incorporate many forms of data, and ethnography admits that the researcher cannot be fully removed from the research (Fetterman, 2019, 2-3). But due to existing concerns around ethnography, such as varying interpretations of the definition, accountability and ethical regulation, I found Critical Ethnography to be a better appropriate approach that is aligned with my goals of the research (Hammersly, 2018, 2). Critical Ethnography requires the researcher to go further than asking "what is" but to consider "what is" within the context of power structures, social control and ideologies (Li, 2009, 289).

In the case of using Critical Ethnography, researchers desire to take the audience deeper into surface appearances, questions neutrality and assumptions (Madison, 2012, 5). For example, in my research, rather than deciding SEL is an objectively good practice with all students (or people), I wish to challenge that assumption and explore the details. Entering my research, I am open to finding negative experiences or feedback. I am choosing this research topic to challenge my own beliefs and experiences. I have had overwhelmingly positive experiences with SEL and students, but I recognize that as a Western, white educator working with groups with vastly different circumstances than myself, I cannot determine my experiences decide what is objectively positive. My ontological position is between critical and constructivist/interpretivist as I wish to gain understanding of subjective perceptions and create change to benefit oppressed groups (Outhwaite & Turner, 2007, 588). Epistemologically speaking my research is a study of social structures, considering the power dynamics inherent to such social structures, with the goal to represent the researcher and those researched (ibid).

To build my Critical Ethnography I utilized methods described and detailed by Madison (2012) as follows: Starting Where You Are, Being a Part of an Interpretive Community, Bracketing Your Subject and The Research Design & Lay Summary (21-24). Starting 'Where You Are' encourages the reader to honor their personal history and knowledge and let this guide the researcher intuitively to their research question and what they really want to investigate about society (Madison, 2012, 21). At the stage of 'Being a Part of an Interpretive Community' it is important for the researcher to familiarize themselves with other studies and literature of the topic(s), and to be both inspired by and critical of such existing research and literature. This will educate the researcher on content, form, methods, context and examples of what is already in the community (Madison, 2012, 22). 'Bracketing Your Subject' is the action of contemplating a purpose and formulating ideas, this step is solidified in creating and confirming the research question (Madison, 2012, 22-24). 'The Research Design & Lay Summary' is the process of creating a research design and plan that will ground the researcher throughout their research and one that is easy to communicate to others, particularly the researched so that the participants understand the process and contribute to informed consent (Madison, 2012, 25-27). Building and executing Critical Ethnography in these steps has ensured that Theoretical Framework will be presented in a critical manner in which the specific group and dominant culture is considered. The active research methods of interview and observation have been constructed with the participants rights as the central concern, from informed consent to the way the questions are structured. The methods chosen have been so with the intention to include diverse perspectives that are not from the dominant culture (in the case of this research the US) and a critique on the dominant culture itself. The data analysis form has been chosen for analysis to be as straight forward as possible. Findings presented includes participant voices directly and researchers educated analysis along with the researchers' observations, hypothesis and disclosure of limitations.

My research took many ethical considerations into account during the whole research creation and implementation process. I was able to work directly with the non-profit IRCO (Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization) and academic SEL program I had previous experience and relationships with. This program is called RISE (Refugee & Immigrant Student Empowerment) and included several active groups of immigrant and refugee students. I will describe in detail the context of the program, different groups and the non-profit. I recruited interview

participants from connecting to the graduated students through the programs RISE-Up group (a virtual sector of the program for college students), and through previously established connections with the non-profit. Before starting the interview process, I clearly explained the research, ability to withdrawal consent at any time, and sent every participant their informed consent forms. I also explained that such personal subjects of age, culture, gender, language and religion may come up in the interviews and participants can choose to not disclose any information if they do not feel comfortable. I recorded written and spoken consent from all the interviewed participants. When saving the interview data, each participant was given a number (Participant #1, #2, etc.) in which their recordings and transcriptions were saved, and their names (if mentioned in the transcripts) were taken out during transcribing. IRCO employees (program director of RISE, facilitators and HR) also received a detailed research proposal and informed consent forms. Due to my previous history with IRCO and the affiliated public high school, I had already submitted the necessary background checks and paperwork to work with students in the US public school system.

3.2 Methods of Research & Data Collection

In this section I will present details about the program (RISE), where I collected my observational data and from where I found my interview participants, I will provide a brief history and description of the RISE program and the non-profit IRCO. I will also outline how the RISE program functions, how I participated while collecting observational data and how I structured and conducted my semi-structured in-depth interviews. I will also provide details on the participants involved (observations and interviews) and any further information or details necessary to understand the interviews and limitations.

3.2.1 Context

My research is centered around the immigrant and refugee youth who participated in the academic SEL program RISE, provided by the non-profit organization IRCO in the US state of Oregon. RISE is an after-school academic and SEL program that is facilitated Monday through Friday at Oregon's largest high school, in the city of Portland. A program, which I volunteered with during my undergraduate studies, and worked with as an employee after-

wards, and with which I still have strong connections. At RISE we conducted after-school tutoring on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, while Fridays were alternating special activities such as life skills workshops, social-emotional wellness groups, field trips or leadership team meetings. The academic tutoring was provided by adult facilitators employed by IRCO and adult volunteers from the local community. Every day the academic program began with 15-30 minutes of intentional SEL exercises (which we called ‘Opening Circle’), including but not limited to check-in activities and get-to-know-you games, all which were suitable for any English level and facilitated by trained IRCO employees that also worked as tutors. Check-in activities and opening games would be with the goal to see how the group of students are feeling, test out energy levels, bring laughter and voices into the room after a long school day, and to get to know each other. We also provided an alternative to academic tutoring (if students did not have homework or anything to do after school), two days a week called ‘Conversation Club’ which were SEL-informed activities, exercises or lessons, facilitated by an IRCO employee with the assistance of a volunteer tutor or student leader.

The RISE program and what it is today was originally spearheaded by Negin Naraghi, a licensed counselor in the state of Oregon. Negin came to the US as an immigrant from Canada and migrated to Canada as a teenager after growing up in Israel, where she was born and where her family had sought religious refuge. Negin built the program based on her expertise stemming from her Master's Degree studies in Psychology from the University of British Columbia, her experience as a licensed counselor in Oregon state, years of experience facilitating SEL programming with immigrant and refugee youth in Canada and working with Partners for Youth Empowerment Global (PYE Global). Negin remains with RISE as the lead facilitator of the SEL groups available for students through the RISE program.

IRCO is the largest community-based non-profit organization in Oregon led by immigrant and refugee employees and works in both states of Oregon and Washington. IRCO provides culturally specifically re-settlement services for the immigrant and refugee population in the form of career readiness and seeking services, educational support, child and elderly care, translation services, stable housing options and legal services. IRCO has nearly 40 years of experience in the community, being founded in 1976 by refugees for refugees who were orig-

inally seeking workforce services. In 2021 IRCO reported that in the state of Oregon alone there were 412,396 foreign-born residents, accounting for 10 % of the state's population. IRCO engages newcomer community members in over 60 sites, including IRCO’s own culturally specific centers, Africa House, Greater Middle East Center, and the Slavic, Eastern European Center & Pacific Islander & Asian Family Center and is serving up to 25,000 new community members a year.

3.2.2 Observations

The following image is a visual representation of the RISE program and its different services, to clearly illustrate and understand the different student groups of RISE I worked with when collecting observational data and when programming occurred. The purple box on the left represents the main RISE program and the blue boxes on the right are specific student groups stemming from the original RISE program but which have specific goals and activities for the student group needs:

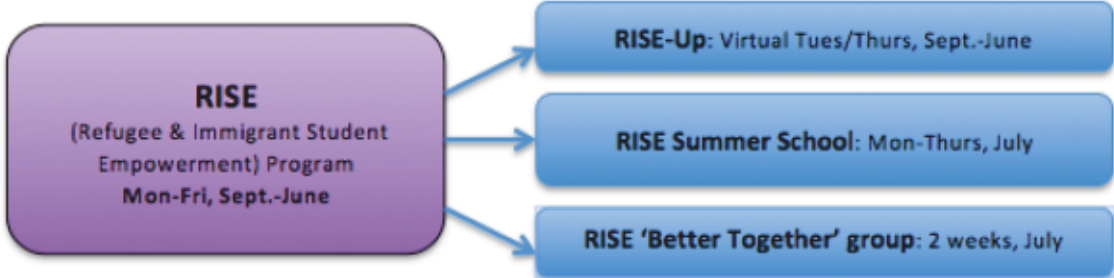


Figure 2 'RISE Programming Groups and Schedule'

The days of the week and months show when these groups and programs are active for student participation. I worked with a total of four different groups of RISE students, high school students (regular RISE), college students ('RISE-Up'), a SEL group ('Better Together') and RISE summer school. Before reaching the US from Finland, I started working with 'RISE-Up' which is facilitated online for college and university students who graduated from RISE

and high school who were seeking academic and emotional support. 'RISE-Up' is facilitated online two days a week, one day for academic work and one day for emotional support work. I started working with 'RISE-Up' virtually from Finland, to re-acquaint myself with the college students and re-establish our relationship before requested interviews. 'RISE-Up' consisted of all young adult college students, (10 of which I was able to interview for interview data). Once I arrived in the US, I worked with RISE in person and the other three groups of RISE students (described above). The main RISE program is facilitated at the high school and consists of three hours after school Mon-Thurs of academic help and SEL activities, Friday reserved special events or activities.

I also worked with two summer school groups. RISE summer school is a series of three-hour sessions, over the course of four weeks Mon-Thurs, during the month of July while there is no regular school for students. RISE summer school is different because these students are either newcomer students who have recently arrived in the US, immigrant or refugee students already in high school who needed extra English language support, or immigrant and refugee students (all learning English) who have just finished middle school and are about to start high school in the upcoming year. These sessions were a blend of SEL activities tailored to suit any language level, English-learning support games and team-building activities.

The last group, 'Better Together' I worked with was a two-week support group consisting of all SEL work, facilitated by the licensed therapist and the original creator of the RISE program, Negin. 'Better Together' was special for several reasons. The group of students was a combination of 1st generation and 2nd generation immigrant and refugee students (all RISE students are usually 1st generation) and none of them were still currently learning English as a second language (all RISE students enter as English language learners but are welcome to stay if they exit English-development classes). The curriculum for this program did not include any English language learning specific components, the group was only focused on developing SEC, there was also no academic component; the sole pure purpose of this group was to help students gain SEC/SEW Content and activities included a comprehensive lesson plan learning about the evolutionary reason humans experience anxiety and stress, how stress and emotions show up in the body physically, discussing how we cope with our emotions in

daily life and learning strategies to de-stress and handle anxiety. This group took place over the summer but was structured exactly the same as we structure our SEL groups that happen during the school year. We start by identifying how emotions come up physically in the body, for example, providing the students two outline images of a human body and asking them with colored pencils, paints, whatever they like, to draw how they feel when they are calm and happy on one outline versus how they feel when they are stressed or anxious on the other outline. Then we learn together about how and why humans feel stress, how stress and anxiety may be an evolutionary trait from prehistoric times when humans had other types of problems (such as predators), but how now we still have physical symptoms of stress and anxiety. We move on to learn about, reflect on and discuss topics such as inner self-talk and perception, growth, panic and comfort zones, to name a few. All sessions are cushioned with intentional opening and closing activities to help the student's warm-up and cool-down from the course content, help them get to know each other and share their stories if they feel comfortable. This group and these type of SEL groups we facilitate at RISE provide a good example of some simple but informed SEL practices and exercises.

Below is the same visual representation of RISE but to clarify my participation and how I collected data from each group:

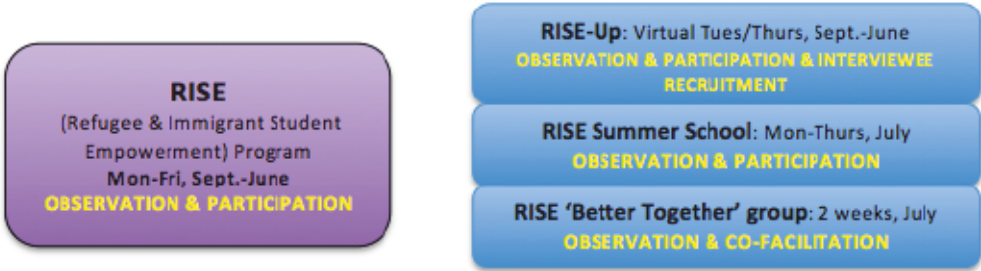


Figure 3 'RISE Programming and Data Collection

I choose IRCO and the RISE program because it is the only program I am familiar with that provides the type of services in which this research can be conducted. Due to my experience, time and closeness with the organization and program, I have established trust and access to

the organization, program and group. I also have the experience and expertise to know how to work well with this group, observe and interact to minimize the amount of harm or tampering with the research data. The group of students is the exact demographic I wish to study, and the group is special because they are already familiar with me and due to my relationship with the other adults in the organization and program, I have a long history of preestablished trust. I hope that this trust allows the students to feel comfortable being as candid and honest with me as possible in the interview process and naturally invokes a safe space in which they share their opinions.

This research and the subsequential findings could be used for future educators that wish to use SEL methods with their students, SEL-facilitators reflecting on their own experiences and methods, or the academic audience that is working with SEL curriculum and immigrant and refugee students. The Findings section from this project exposes topics which researchers could focus on and expand upon, for example, any of the following subthemes and themes found provide areas of future investigation.

3.2.3 Interviews

I obtained my data through observations taken as a participant and co-facilitator with the students who are currently in the RISE program as well as interviewing 10 of the adult college students who had already been through the RISE program and affiliated SEL activities. The 10 students I interviewed graduated from high school and had participated in the RISE program during high school for a minimum of one year, up to four years, and had graduated from high school no more than six years ago. All the students were either in community college, university or in the process of graduating and career seeking. I choose to only interview students who are over 18 years old for ethical reasons. These students had already been through the program and high school experience, and now as adults, have developed a sense of independence and autonomy, do not need consent from an adult family member, and have had time to process, and reflect on their time and feelings. I also hope that due to the fact they are older, adult, more independent and autonomous, that this helps them be honest with me, the researcher, when discussing the topics of SEL and culture, in addition to the pre-established trust we have. All of the students had a pre-established relationship with me, and I had

worked with them either as an adult mentor, facilitator of the RISE program or tutor. The capacity at which I personally worked with each student is not mentioned specifically because the nature of the interviews is based on generalized feelings about all the adults who worked for RISE and the SEL services we provided, which included a generalized experience of all these roles (mentor, tutor and facilitator), of which the duties frequently blended together.

When developing my research plan, interview data was central to my planned data collection process. Due to the nature of the research question, I find it completely necessary to include the voices of the students themselves in this research, and to center those voices as data in the narrative of research. My findings from the interview data will be related back to the literature and observational data, but the interview data is the most central content to this research project. The perspective, experiences, voices and stories of the students and their cultural experiences with the RISE program and SEL content will be the driving force behind the result and conclusion of this research project.

I held semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 10 immigrant and refugee students all who are currently at different levels of their college and career experience. The interviews were between 30 minutes to two hours. All participants identified as male or female, I interviewed four males and six females. The participants spoke at least two and up to 18 languages and were from eight different countries of origin (where they were born as reported by them). Participants were between the ages of 19 – 24 (as reported by them – ‘real’ ages vary for immigrant and refugees due to birth certificates, visa requirements and educational law concerns). During the time of interviewing, I had known all students' minimum of three years and maximum of seven years, and the students had not graduated longer than six years ago. The follow table is a summarize of the interviewee participants demographics:

Table 1 ‘Participant Demographics’

Participant (pseudonym)	Age & Gender	Origin Country	Languages	Years in RISE	Year Graduated High school
Diaco	24 - Male	Iraq	English, Arabic	3.5 years	2017
Massawa	19 - Female	Ethiopia	Tigrinya, English	3 years	2021
Abdullahi	22 - Male	Somalia	Somali, English, Arabic, Turkish	1 year	2018
Aziza	23 - Female	Afghanistan	Pashto, Dari, Urdu, English	3 years	2019
Imani	22 - Female	Kenya	Somali, English, Swahili	7 years	2019
Fatuma	22 - Female	Uganda	Somali, English, Ugandan, Swahili	1 year	2019
Bintang	20 - Male	Malaysia	Rohingya, English, Bahasa Malay, Hindi, Korean	6 years	2019
Lian	21 - Female	China	Mandarin, English	5 years	2018
Mariam	21 - Female	Ethiopia	Amharic, Oromo, English,	4 years	2020
Ahmed	23 - Male	Somalia	Somali, English	3 years	2018

The interviews were either conducted in a public place (coffee shop in the city) or via Zoom in which the student and I would be at home. All interviews were conducted in English, I recorded each interview, took notes and transcribed each interview. I obtained consent to collect the data from each student digitally with a digital signature, and verbal consent recording in each interview. Interviews included eight open-ended questions in which the students could answer as simply or in-depth as they pleased, or pass. Additional questions were added, or some questions were changed, during interviews for clarification purposes or to request further description on something the students mentioned that I found relevant, or if a student had a question or concern themselves, we took time to explore that as well. I would also ask about the specific SEL groups and activities they participated in, if they would have felt more comfortable with non-white facilitators or someone from their own culture/country, how they felt about adults using the English language or if they preferred we have tutors or adults who spoke their language(s), but these may be structured differently for the student to understand. The following is an example of various questions used.

Interview Questions:

- #1.) If you told someone about RISE, what would you say?
- #2.) What parts of RISE helped you the most?
- #3.) Are there any parts of RISE you would change?
[What would you add?]
- #4.) How did it make you feel to be at RISE and to be around so many people that are different from you culturally [peers and adults]?
- #5.) Did you ever feel or notice the difference between you and the adults [culturally] at RISE?
- #6.) Do you feel your culture was respected at RISE?
[Do you feel your religion was respected at RISE?]
- #7.) How did it make you feel that RISE was always facilitated in English?
[Why did you prefer it was English?] [Did you ever wish it was facilitated in your language?] [Why would it be unfair if it was facilitated in another language?]
- #8.) Did you benefit more from RISE socially or academically and why?

Figure 4 'Interview Questions'

The main challenge I experienced was commitment to the interviews and timely scheduling of the interviews, which is a challenge I expected. This demographic of students usually has many responsibilities, and it can be hard for them to find time to volunteer, so my biggest challenge was scheduling and keeping the interviews, which is why they were not all in person during my time in the US but also via Zoom. There were not many other issues in observation and working with the groups or interviewing the participants.

In total I worked with and observed these different groups for 36 days and a total of 65 hours. My roles during these groups varied from observer, participant, co-facilitator and mentor. In all the groups I observed, spoke to, interacted with and worked directly with the students. In RISE and RISE-Up, I participated in games and activities, acted as a volunteer and tutor, but did not facilitate any games or activities myself. In RISE summer school and the summer SEL group I facilitated games, activities and discussions myself while also co-facilitating social-emotional lectures, discussions and reflection sessions. Most of my observations were taken after the sessions with the students when I had time to sit down and write, but some were taken on location at the time, if I was able to and it was urgent to take observations. Interviews were set-up in person or over the phone by me directly with the student, and all interviews were recorded.

3.3 Thematic Analysis

I used Thematic Analysis to analyze my interview and observational data. Thematic analysis was the most appropriate form of analysis for my research because it can be used with large quantities of data and several types of data. In this section I will describe my process with each data set. Due to having much more interview data and how in-depth the data is, I will go into detail about my analysis of the interviews first, and then briefly describe my process in analyzing the observations, before presenting findings in the same order.

I followed the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2012), outlined below with details regarding my personal process with the interview data (60-69):

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:
Interviews, whether conducted in person or via Zoom, were recorded. Every interview was listened to once alone, transcribed using software, and listened to and read again while reviewing the transcriptions to correct any mistakes (which was done twice).
2. Generating codes (inductive open-coding and semi-inductive focus-coding):
I began coding by open-coding half (five) of the interviews, which means every single line for transcript was coded in order for codes to emerge inductively. Then I coded only relevant material from the transcripts (focus-coding) in the remaining half of the interviews with the codes I created from the first half of the interviews (semi-inductive codes).
3. Searching for themes:
Themes naturally emerged while reviewing and coding the data, there were patterns in what codes emerged with others, and what questions prompted which codes. I oscillated between Phase Three and Phase Four multiple times before confirming themes.
4. Creating and reviewing themes:
Themes were easy to notice, but many codes and multiple codes fitting into multiple themes made it difficult to organize codes into themes easily, I will explain in detail how I made decisions and organized codes into themes further along.

5. Defining and naming themes:
This part of the process of defining and naming themes was done several times to finalize themes and confirm their relevancy and usefulness to the research question.
6. Producing and presenting the research findings:
My findings from the interview data will be presented with my relevant observational data in Findings and eventually discussed how the Findings relate back to the literature in Discussion.

The steps provided by Braun and Clark (2012) helped me orientate my data during the analysis process. However, as noted above, I moved back and forth between several phases as Braun and Clark describe, “Moreover, analysis is not a linear process where you simply move from one phase to the next. Instead, it is more recursive process, where you move back and forth as needed, throughout the phases” (16). This sentiment resonated with my research process, moving from Searching for Themes to Creating and Review Themes was not linear, I moved back and forth through several times to make my analysis concise and focused, which I describe in detail in my Analysis Process section for transparency.

I used the same phases for my observations, but the process was much shorter and easier. My observations and the following analysis were written partly by hand because of the nature/environment in which observations were taken. It was easiest to use a notebook every day for observations and field notes. I took field notes and observations during the programming sessions and right after in a notebook, because of this I also did part of my analysis by hand. I will briefly describe the process here before going into detail further along. 1.) Familiarizing yourself with your data: Read and re-read my notes during observational period to make further reflections and notes for details and clarity. Read and re-read throughout the research process before starting and during analysis. 2.) Generating codes: Inductively coded, only focus-coded relevant material. 3.) Searching for themes: Themes naturally emerged and were created when I typed up all the written codes in a document, Facilitation, Discipline and Activities were my final themes. 4.) Creating and reviewing themes: Needed to create and reduce codes once and reviewed themes twice. 4.) Defining and naming themes: Unlike interview data defining and naming themes was a lot more straightforward due to less codes, and only needed to be done once. 5.) Producing and presenting the research findings: Findings were easier to come to and validate because there was no interpretation of other people's

words, the interpretation of my observations was from my perspective and more focused on the adults and myself as I was co-facilitating and de-briefing sessions with adult facilitators.

3.3.1 Analysis of Interviews

Originally, there were an overwhelming number of codes to organize and analyze from the interview data. I attempted to code several times to make more succinct codes, but the truth of the matter is that there would be many codes, and I as the researcher it is my responsibility to identify what was a code, what codes could be combined, or which codes were a larger theme. From 111 pages of transcript data, I had so many codes because I coded anything I thought meaningful or frequent enough to be deemed a code, my attempt at re-coding didn't necessarily help because it gave a similar result. The part of this process that granted the most clarity was when I began organizing the potential codes into their own documents. Here I will provide examples of my reasoning process before presenting Findings. Final codes and themes will also be presented in a table in this section.

Below is an example of the original number of codes and a description of reducing codes from 65 to 17:

Potential Codes:

1. Mainstream classes/teachers	17. Exhibiting SEG	34. Understanding	53. Respect
2. Be myself	18. RISE culture	35. Lasting relationships	54. Time
3. Gratitude	19. <u>New Experiences</u>	36. Love	55. 'RISE' English
4. Comfortable	20. Fun	37. Second family	56. Learning US school system
5. Tutors	21. Care about me	38. Adult Mentorship	57. College help
6. Missing Home	22. Feeling welcomed	39. School environment	58. Enjoying SEL activities/group
7. Expanding RISE	23. Academic Pressure	40. "No one in my family went to college"	59. Homework help
8. Small things matter	24. RISE environment	41. Building confidence	60. <u>Accessing resources</u>
9. Future	25. Someone to talk to	42. Friendships in School	61. "Didn't think I would graduate high school"
10. Opportunities	26. Social Support	43. White people	62. <u>Motivation & goal setting</u>
11. "We're all in the same boat"	27. Hardships	44. Feeling included	63. Social anxiety
12. Safe space	28. Feeling different	45. Food	64. Learning English
13. Leadership	29. Identifying with multiple cultures	46. Open mindedness	65. Feeling happy
14. "Wouldn't be where I am today without RISE"	30. Home Culture & Family	47. Culture	
15. Relationships & connections	31. Community	48. Curiosity	
16. Academic Help	32. Desire to include families	49. Energy	
	33. Diversity	50. Cultural exchange	
		51. <u>Adults making effort</u>	
		52. American culture	

Figure

5

'Original

Codes'

Codes in this image in bold were either combined or expanded upon to create themes or made into their own theme. The codes *Relationships & Connections* and *Lasting Relationships* were combined to create the theme *Relationships & Connections* because of how frequently they were used together, how broad the codes were and how often they were coded with another code; they were more useful as themes rather than codes. Similarly, instead of being a code, *Academic Help*, *Learning English*, and *Home Culture & Family* became themes, because of their broad descriptions which many other codes which fell under their description, and their individual importance.

Codes that have been strikethrough-ed were removed for irrelevancy to the research question, lack of frequent use or combined with/absorbed by another code due to similarity in how they were used. *American culture* was combined with *White people* to make its own compound code. The terms ‘white people’ and ‘American culture’ are two different terms, but they were used essentially the same by participants. *Feeling happy* and *Fun* were removed due to irrelevancy to answer the research question, and because when they were mentioned in relevancy to the research question, there was a more preceding code they belonged under. It was difficult to make the decisions on which codes remained while looking at the codes themselves, they all feel important. The process of organizing each code via their own document was essential in finding codes that were repetitive, irrelevant or in actuality a larger theme.

Below is an image of my final 17 codes:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1. Mainstream classes/teachers | 10. Building confidence |
| 2. Safe space | 11. White people/American Culture |
| 3. New Experiences & Open Mindedness | 12. Cultural exchange |
| 4. Someone to talk to | 13. Adults making Effort & Time |
| 5. Identifying with multiple cultures | 14. 'RISE' English |
| 6. Community | 15. Homework & College Help |
| 7. Desire to Include Families | 16. Accessing Resources & Opportunities |
| 8. Diversity | 17. Motivation & Future |
| 9. Adult Mentorship | |

Figure 6 'Final Codes'

The individual code documents containing affiliating quotes helped me in Phases Three-Five of analysis. This process also helped me see themes easily as I quickly started to notice what codes had in common or how they were specifically different. I will explain how my codes and themes interact in more detail in Findings. Below is a table creating of the final codes organized into subsequent themes and final themes, which will be the foundation for the Findings section and give a basic idea of what I will discuss. Codes are re-arranged in the order they will appear in Findings.

Table 2 ‘Codes, Subthemes and Themes’

Code:	Subtheme:	Theme:
Homework & College Help	Academic Success	Empowerment
Adult Mentorship		
Motivation & Future Goals		
Accessing Resources & Opportunities		
Mainstream Classes/Teachers		
‘RISE’ English	Learning English	
Safe Space		
New Experiences & Open Mindedness	Student Identity	
Building Confidence		
Diversity		
Community	Relationships & Connections	Integration & Adaptation
Cultural Exchange		
Someone to talk to		
White people/American Culture	Respect & Care	
Adults Making Effort & Time		
Identifying with Multiple Cultures	Home Culture & Family	
Desire to Include Families		

Below I am also providing a full list of my final codes with examples from the transcriptions to illuminate what type of excerpts would be affiliated with which codes. Please note that English and grammar are not perfect as they are direct quotes from the students and only lightly edited.

Table 3 ‘Codes and Examples’

Codes:	Excerpt from Transcript:
--------	--------------------------

<i>Homework & College Help</i>	"If I did not have found RISE, [...], I don't know if [I] would be able to even go to college, to be honest. Like I would probably be that one person who, you know, loves education, but because of not having the right techniques or methods..." -Imani
<i>Adult Mentorship</i>	"...for people like me for the college who doesn't have someone to help them, it's great to have that. They will get a lot of benefits." - Massawa
<i>Motivation & Future</i>	"You see the energy, I think that's what motivated them more, to study harder and work harder. It's a place that help you to excel in your education, to also make you believe that you are able to achieve stuff." -Diacó
<i>Accessing Resources & Opportunities</i>	"Applications like all the stuff that I learned, I learned all that advice like how to fill out for scholarships, schools' applications, like basically the applications process, all that I learned from RISE, I did not learn in my classes, I did not learn in school." - Fatima
<i>Mainstream Classes & Teachers</i>	"...she's [mainstream teacher] [...] she's just gonna shut you down to the point where you don't even know what's happening in her classes, right? You're afraid to ask in her classes and stuff like that. [...]" - Imani
<i>'RISE' English</i>	"That's why sometimes when we say something in RISE, we say like, slowly and clearly, right, so like, students can learn and be heard, right?" - Bintang
<i>Safe Space</i>	"So, you just used to this group, and you were feeling was like safe to express yourself and to make mistakes..." - Diaco
<i>New Experiences & Open Mindedness</i>	"...it was my first-time hiking and then it took us like three hours to go to like our destination, I was really tired. [...] ...of course, it was fun, [...] and I told them like, 'I would never go back hiking.' But then I ended up, I actually became more hiking person afterwards, after I said I would never go back." - Mariam
<i>Building Confidence</i>	"I made a lot of friends like it probably gave me like a little bit more confidence like to talk to people too. And like made my social life better... [...] ...also like when I'm not with them, like I can like go up to like other people and also talk." - Mariam
<i>Diversity</i>	"You don't have to be the odd one. Comfort because you're not you're not just one, you know, among a lot of people, you're not just the only one different. But finding these common experiences kind of put us all together in this universal language. You could just be yourself, right?" - Ahmed
<i>Community</i>	"It was right to be there, at that moment, you know. I guess it's a sacred place for me. It's just this this place that I feel welcomed." - Bintang
<i>Cultural Exchange</i>	"I had there, lots of my friends from Somalia, from Nepal, and also other countries, students, but I learned so many things from them about their culture, their life, live and everything." - Aziza
<i>Someone to talk to</i>	"There's a lot of kids that like, need help with social and I think that is another one, where you just want to talk to someone, [...] give you advice. [...] Even if you even if even you cannot like help them, just be there." - Abdullahi
<i>White people/ American Culture</i>	"...that kind of shocked me... why those people being so...They're so very American!" - Lian
<i>Adults Making Effort & Time</i>	"You always tried to give your time and effort to any student that you can help and like, you know, like that alone is, you know, like who cares about, your skin color or like, where you from, it's like, that doesn't matter."- Abdullahi
<i>Identifying with Multiple Cultures</i>	"Where we were, we didn't just like, we weren't born in one place. And then we were just like, used to certain individual people, you know. I think that, like, if you were that person, that is you meet other people from other cultures, there'll be a culture shock for you, you know."- Abdullahi
<i>Desire to Include Families</i>	"...if they were able to incorporate more parental or guardian type of relationship... the parent is still kind of feel stuck with this boundary, [...]more like a barrier, we don't really understand the system, understand what the child is going through the school." - Ahmed

3.3.1 Analysis of Observations

The hours I observed and participated in RISE programming, including virtual and in-person programming was 65 total hours. I kept track of hours each day in a spreadsheet while keeping my field notes and observations written in a notebook and were more easily accessible. My observations are a combination of taking field notes on site during sessions or written reflections taken right after observation, either in my field notes notebook or on printed out lesson plans from the programming. The nature of hand-written observations has made it more difficult to present, as all the data is not easily transferrable to documents such as the interview data. I will provide as much explanation and visuals as possible to adequately represent my analysis process. The total number of student groups I observed and worked with was four, as a reminder (already previously detailed in Methods): RISE after-school program, RISE-Up, RISE 'Better Together' SEL-group and RISE summer school. The following image shows how I recorded my hours, screenshots taken from a spreadsheet.

Student Contact Hours:							
Date	Hours	Program	Location	Date	Hours	Program	Location
17.5	2.5	RISE		28.6	2	RISE SS	
18.5	2.5	RISE		30.6	2	RISE SS	
19.5	2.5	RISE		6.7	3	RISE SS	
24.5	2.5	RISE		7.7	3	RISE SS	
25.5	2.5	RISE					
27.5	2.5	RISE		4 days 10 hours			
31.5	2.5	RISE		Date	Hours	Program	Location
13.6	2.5	RISE		12.4	1.5	RISE UP	Zoom
14.6	2.5	RISE		14.4	1.5	RISE UP	Zoom
15.6	2.5	RISE		19.4	1.5	RISE UP	Zoom
				21.4	1.5	RISE UP	Zoom
10 days 25 hours				26.4	1.5	RISE UP	Zoom
Date	Hours	Program	Location	7.5	1.5	RISE UP	Zoom
11.7	1.5	UB - BT		14.5	1.5	RISE UP	Zoom
12.7	1.5	UB - BT		16.5	1.5	RISE UP	Zoom
13.7	1.5	UB - BT		24.5	1.5	RISE UP	Zoom
14.7	1.5	UB - BT		26.5	2.5	RISE UP	Zoom
18.7	1.5	UB - BT		7.6	1.5	RISE UP	Zoom
19.7	1.5	UB - BT		14.6	1.5	RISE UP	Zoom
20.7	1.5	UB - BT		16.6	1	RISE UP	Zoom
8 days 10 hours				14 Days 20 Hours			

Figure 7 'Student Contact Hours'

Below I have provided scanned copies of some of my field notes. I have chosen to include excerpts from my field notes in RISE and RISE 'Better Together' because these warranted the most field notes and observations taken and produced the most relevant data to my findings and results. Field notes from RISE-Up and RISE Summer School were complementary to the following examples but less detailed, due to RISE-Up being facilitated via Zoom and producing less opportunities for observation and RISE Summer School requiring more of my active attention on-site and having less student contact time. The following field notes and observations were made in the RISE after-school program.

DATE/TIME: 6.2.23 LOW RISK

Observation

The game (activity) is meant to help them. RISE
 - get used to asking language questions in SIMILE
 - meant to help about those things they learn about LEARN ABOUT
 themselves, and the others learn about LEARN ABOUT
 them as people, who they are, where they
 from, what languages they speak
 - respect amount of noise and safety SAFETY
 - having always volutes without giving them
 - always allowing as good students & teachers ALLIANCE
 - always volutes can be good responses
 implemented in the groups not necessarily include
 - reminds me of how important it is to have COMMUNITY
 - helps, volutes starts to speak the language
 of the students - non-accepted is all not acceptable
 - the balance between structure and flexibility
 - chaos - not relevant FLEXIBILITY 'CASE' 'PACES'
 - when the facilitator is having side conversations,
 using the students language, it is
 distracting and could be problematic: **multi-lingual**
 - starting circle - on facilitator doesn't
 start language unless she asks to the
 - it is important to feel, look and act
 like a machine. **EXCEPTION OF**
Part 1

"English learners" friendly games, access to
 to explore simple **MEMORABLE** **DOWN** **OR**
 - "and do-know-you" type games **THE SAME**
 questions are also tied to students' identity &
 empowerment (self-management)

DATE/TIME: 23.6.2023

Observations

Facilitation is very important, already known
 and noted but details of observations:
 - greeting students when they come in the
 room - relevant **PROFESSORIAL** **INDICATE** **PRESENCE**
 - not being distracted, being attentive and
 during the in-between times - relevant **NATURAL**
 - "entering" the room, taking charge of
 the room, being an authoritative figure in
 the classroom - relevant **AUTHORITY** **DISCIPLINE** **BOUNDARY**
 - how much of the things do the students notice?
 - affects of students' respect the facilitator
 - students inherently want to respect you,
 want order, but it must be earned, that
 is not easy, having authority in the
 - theme: trust, authority, classroom based on trust
 and discipline

Themes:
 - authority vs trust/order **DISCIPLINE** **BOUNDARY** **NOT "BAD"**
 - disruptive behaviors & "appropriateness"
 - empowerment vs stifling

Observation 1.7.2022

Students not being quiet, volutes, acknowledged when
 entering the room **JUST LIKE MATHS/SCIENCE CLASS/TEACHING**

Weak facilitation makes a difference in atmosphere,
 buy-in, and efficiency. **WELL TRAINED FACILITATORS**
MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Buy-in is low with bad facilitation
 when students are speaking their own language
 (Spanish in this case), they are discussing the
 subject matter / content, lack of the system
 or organizing the question together. **SOMETIMES THE**
 basic classroom management and control, volutes so
 relevant **A DISTRACTION FOR**
THE LEARNER

Figure 8 'Field Notes and Observations 1'

My original field notes and observations taken on-site are in black ink with cursive writing. Cursive writing in red ink is the first impressions of meaning found in the observation upon my second read, I also highlighted in yellow anything I found significant and the all-caps red and blue writing was my by-hand coding process. The following images are scanned copies of some of my field notes and observations in the RISE 'Better Together' SEL group.

7/17

Observation Reflection of [redacted] = 1

- 9 sessions
- 2 facilitators
- 11 students

Session: Introduce Rules & begin building Community

Opening Activity: Mingle (question, drop) *open, simple, low-key, first game activity*

Open to do with *without the say*

Depends on *how* you do with *with*

Music, body part matching groups

Pre-assigned questions or all told some environmental question

It is asking of the students to have the courage to approach each other, may ask question swap with, see both not if you is make low-key the song can be difficult if you group first

Introduction - Facilitator always need a strong introduction, innovation

Name, pronouns, something you bring to the group

Goals, agreements - somewhat participants

Walking Name Game - always good to learn someone's name, have fun, giggle

Talking Polaroids to make appreciation of all students

A game - different ideas/different categories - 1-5 questions open to answer yourself on round, second round ask someone else

Closing/Appreciation Circle - appreciate the person to your right/left, whoever would do great on

Open to appreciate anyone if noting doesn't change

Goals:

Form supportive friendships with people, explore coping/growth activities to help us understand ourselves/relationships, learn tangible tools that can help reduce stress & anxiety

Agreements:

Listen to attention

Communicate with kindness, look for strengths in yourself and others, pay attention to what comes up for you and how you can take care of yourself, create a space of safety by honoring each others confidentiality

Session: establish strengths resources participants can use

Painting

Review Goals & Agreements

Opening Activity: Mini Photo Voice activity

Can take some time for participants to find a photo to share

Participants usually enthusiastic share a lot comes out for them as share about life

Options for prompts: something you love doing, something peaceful, someone you love, students sometimes don't like activity, creativity if the prompt for carry

Journaling with prompts always have been interesting, prompts play into it than others

Some students don't connect with journaling, maybe having another activity for them to do: painting or arts/crafts, maybe reading

Figure 9 Field Notes and Observations 2'

The cursive writing in black here are my field notes accounting the actual games and activities we were facilitating with the students, written before and during programming. Cursive writing in green are positive observations while cursive writing in red is areas of improvement or concern, notes which were taken right after programming. Highlighted in yellow are points I found of importance upon my second reading and reflection on the field notes. All caps red and blue writing are codes. There were also field notes and observations taken on printed out copies of the curriculum. All codes were then typed out in a document and edited before being sorted into themes.

My final codes and themes were created rather easily when writing them out by hand. Since I did observation analysis after my interview analysis, I could code much faster and knew how to simplify my codes in the beginning to minimize time in the process. I will organize my observational data in a more succinct manner than my interview data because there is less data to analyze. I will present my codes and themes in a similar table but include examples of codes in the same table rather than in a separate image, such as I did with interviews. The

following is a table of codes, examples of codes and corresponding themes that emerged from codes, the colors are to signify the different ultimate themes and nothing more.

Table 4 'Codes, Examples, Themes-Observations'

Codes	Example	Theme
Execution of Plan	Facilitators both contributing to plan and being well-informed before session with students.	Facilitation
Being on the 'same page'	Facilitators in agreement about standard protocol. (Example: greetings students when they walk through the door)	
Minimal Distractions	Facilitators stay off devices unless there is an emergency.	
Disruption not inherently 'bad'	Not scolding or deeming disruptive behavior as 'bad'.	Discipline
Multiple Languages	Allowing presence of multiple languages in session/classroom.	
Include students in Rule Making	Creating 'Community Agreements' together.	
Low-risk games	Start with easy games to understand and feel comfortable	Activities
Variety & Flexibility in Activities	Variety in games during sessions and having options within those games/activities.	
De-briefing & Processing	Always making time to de-brief session or lesson together or separate.	
Personal Life Connection	Activities and games that allow students to share about themselves and personal lives.	

My analysis from observations found a total of three themes: *Facilitation*, *Discipline* and *Activities* from 10 codes. There originally were more codes but all relative codes were easily condensed into 10 and irrelevant or infrequent codes were removed to not confuse the Findings. I will describe the themes and the affiliating codes of my observational data deeper in the Findings section after discussing interview Findings. As I have analyzed interview data and observational data separately and presented the analysis process separately, I will do the same in presenting my Findings. I will present Findings from the interviews, then observations, and I will conclude the Findings section with how the two data sets complement and

support

each

other.

4. Findings

I will begin by presenting the findings from my interview data and then my observational data findings. The interview findings are structured by the subtheme as follows: *Academic Success*, *Learning English*, *Student Identity*, *Relationships & Connections*, *Respect & Care*, and finally *Home Culture & Family*. These subthemes were ultimately categorized into the final themes of *Empowerment* including the subthemes: *Academic Success*, *Learning English*, *Student Identity*, and *Integration & Adaptation* including the subthemes: *Relationships & Connections*, *Respect & Care*, *Home Culture & Family*.

I first present the most prominent findings, which all the students spoke to at length, and which include concepts that do not elicit much doubt such as, *Academic Success* and *Learning English*. The subthemes of *Academic Success* and *Learning English* were discussed clearly, frequently and unambiguously, while *Student Identity* required more attention and critical thinking as the researcher. These subthemes of *Relationships & Connections*, *Respect & Care*, and *Home Culture & Family* all adhere to the theme *Empowerment* which I will explain here in the Findings and explore deeper in the Discussion. Sequentially I present findings which were also common themes thoroughly discussed but which required more extensive exploration, such as *Relationships & Connections* and *Respect & Care*. The presence of the themes *Relationships & Connections* and *Respect & Care* were as present as *Academic Success* and *Learning English* but included more in-depth topics and subject matter. The material inherent to the themes *Relationships & Connections* and *Respect & Care* are more involved and multifaceted. Lastly, I present findings which required the more nuanced analysis, *Home Culture & Family*. These subthemes, *Relationships & Connections*, *Respect & Care* and *Home Culture & Family* are ultimately placed in the theme *Integration & Adaptation*. This theme is innately less comprehensive though the importance to the students and their experiences are apparent. It is important to note that since I am the researcher analyzing the students' words and experiences Due to the nature of the topics *Student Identity* and *Home Culture & Family* I take less liberties in determining the meaning in the results and defer to presenting the results as the students presented them and interpret what the results could mean. I will explain how these subthemes ultimately resulted in the themes of *Empowerment* and *Integration & Adaptation* thoroughly throughout the Findings and Discussion.

Lastly, I will present my observational findings. I will present the themes in my findings as such: *Facilitation, Discipline and Activities*. During observation I was not only an observer but co-facilitator and participant at times. My observations focused mainly on the adult facilitators (including myself) and adult volunteer tutors, to present a holistic view of SEL instructions and programming with immigrant and refugee students. While my interview findings are meant to present the students perspectives, the observational findings are to represent the adult's role and to critically research the adult's participation and SEL contents contribution in SEL instruction and programming. To conclude I will connect the interview Findings with the observational Findings once both data sets findings are represented individually.

4.1 Interviews

While the audience is reading the interview Findings I would like to note that the students first language is not English, so the language in the quotes is not perfect and sometimes confusing. They are also young adults who use words such as 'like', 'you know' and 'um' frequently, I have removed many of these filler words for clarity and kept some for authenticity. I have not removed or edited grammar in any way. I have included '[...]' to show a portion has been taken out, the portion taken out was either off topic, repetitive, stuttering or many 'um', 'like' and 'you now' types of filler language. The facilitators, students and volunteer tutors' names have been redacted. I have included quotes that would be clear to the audience outside of the larger conversation and explain them in context.

4.1.1 Academic Success

The students reported overwhelmingly that *Homework & College Help* received was incredibly appreciated and useful to their academic lives and led to their *Academic Success*. Students often made comments such as participant Fatima stated, "I would have honestly not passed my math class if it wasn't for the homework help. That was something that was a great help and a benefit for me." In this statement by Fatima, it is clear that the help had a lasting effect (not failing a math class), rather than a temporary or negligible benefit to her *Academic Success*. Similarly, students mentioned frequently they do not know if they would be pursuing college or have graduated high school without receiving the *Homework & College Help* from RISE, and the way they spoke about *Academic Success* showed how important it was for them

to graduate and go to college. Students frequently mentioned that the *Adult Mentorship* helped them reach their academic goals and helped them with concepts of *Motivation & Future*. Ahmed mentioned *Adult Mentorship* using the word 'advocacy' and mentioning both *Motivation & Future*, "RISE is advocacy, because without RISE, I wouldn't be here doing college because I didn't know anything about it and it was you guys and [redacted], highly motivated me... So for me, one of the most impact I have gained was through mentorship." Not only is Ahmed speaking of getting to where he is now and increased motivation due to mentorship, but he is also alluding to another important point of *Accessing Resources & Opportunities*.

Students reported the *Homework & College Help* taught them things that they did not learn via *Mainstream Classes/Teachers* which helped them in the process of *Accessing Resources & Opportunities*. Many students stated they were not sure if they would have had the opportunity to go to college without the extra support from RISE. This connection was made when the students were talking about services they received and how it led to *Accessing Resources & Opportunities*. Diaco recounts, "[...] being part of the RISE, you just see and get to so many resources that can help you to believe more than yourself. [...] ...new platforms are new opportunities to us that we didn't know about. So for example, when they do a workshop about college and, and they bring somebody who is from was, has been probably in your shoes before, who is probably an immigrant, this person they speak to you about their college experience and how did they were able to get into college and what they did. [...] They definitely helped me understand the school system for sure." Diaco here is saying how *Accessing Resources & Opportunities* through the RISE program helped him learn the US school system and consider college as an option, even as an immigrant/refugee student. Students also used words such as 'tools' and 'benefits' to describe how RISE helped them with school via workshops, mentorship, academic help among other services.

One of the reasons *Homework & College Help* and *Academic Success* was so important to the students was due to how they spoke about their new environment and specifically how *Mainstream Classes/Teachers* made them feel – often negative. Abdullahi, reflecting on his high school experience, reports "... I'm like, 'Oh, my God, like, I couldn't have done this'. It was just like me not believing in myself into like panicking about stuff [...] and I was getting this, anxiety like stuff, because it was just a new environment for me ...". In this quote Abdullahi is

reflecting on the assignments he had to do and how *Mainstream Classes/Teachers* were anxiety inducing for him, due to lack of confidence and the new environment. Many students made comments about how the school environment and experiences in *Mainstream Classes/Teachers* caused negative emotions and anxiety or how it was hard to feel comfortable speaking up in classes. The *Academic Success* and *Adult Mentorship* the students received at RISE helped them feel better with *Mainstream Classes/Teachers*, enabling them to do better in school. This transference via *Homework & College Help* via *Adult Mentorships* to *Academic Success* and *Accessing Resources & Opportunities* empowers the students in the new school environment and other aspects of their lives, leading to overall *Empowerment*.

4.1.2 Learning English

The next subtheme I would like to discuss, *Learning English*, had many connections to *Academic Success* as well, but was important on its own due to the main two findings disclosed by the students. Students gave accounts on the importance of '*RISE*' *English* and the presence of a *Safe Space* for their *Learning English* journey. Though this subtheme is smaller, it is important to the students and directly influenced their ability to reach *Academic Success*, which was contingent on the students' abilities in *Learning English* and ultimately their *Empowerment* process.

One of the most interesting pieces of the students describing *Learning English* was a specific type of English used that they found helpful, which is coded in this research project as '*RISE*' *English* for sake of clarity but essentially is just a type of speaking or communicating. Ahmed gave one of the clearest, succinct accounts in his description, "When RISE was, when they were trying to explain the rules for the games or different aspects or homework or any type of way... The English wasn't like the normal English. And that I mean, by like, the words were picked, wisely, right? Words that we were able to understand, maybe a little lower vocabulary, that was easier to understand. Even the way, it wasn't just like speaking English fast and what not. It was made sure to read slowly and clearly communicate that to us." The concept of '*RISE*' *English* is simply described by students as the adults speaking slowly, clearly and intentionally for the students to be able to understand; the adults at RISE spoke considerately and understood the students were still *Learning English*. This aspect of working with immigrant and refugee students seems obvious, but the frequency at which students described

'RISE' English and spoke about their appreciate for it, means that it was something special they received at RISE and helped them feel capable to learn their new language.

In addition to *'RISE' English* helping the students, they also reported the presence and environment of a *Safe Space* to be important for them in *Learning English*. Lian described RISE early on in our interview as, "It's a place where I can just talk to people in the practice. [...] So RISE is place to improve, that improve the communication skill. [...] Oh, and the RISE is also a good place for me to find people that have the same level of English as me. That that greatly reduced nervousness I had, at RISE creates a comfortable environment." In this quote Lian moves from describing RISE is a good place for *Learning English* to why the environment was a *Safe Space* to do that. In this account one of the reasons Lian is describing RISE as a comfortable environment is not only due to the presence of other English language learners at her level but is also because of the SEL activities RISE conducted every day to help the students feel comfortable with one another and create that *Safe Space*, as she spoke about in our interview later. When students spoke about the SEL activities they were expected to participate in at RISE they would describe the activities and environment as a *Safe Space* to express themselves and make mistakes.

Allowing the students to receive accessible English through *'RISE' English* and giving them a comfortable place to naturally practice in a *Safe Space* is empowering them in their new language. *Academic Success* and *Learning English* will contribute to the *Empowerment* of the students in many facets of their new lives in the US, such as through obvious means of being able to compete in and understand college with their native peers. Additionally, these aspects will help them gain a sense of *Empowerment* through their successes in school and help develop their own individual identity that can be created from their home heritage and new experiences, their *Student Identity*.

4.1.3 Student Identity

Student spoke about their identity in many ways, but while students would talk about *New Experiences & Open Mindedness, Building Confidence* and *Diversity*, this is where they most often would talk about themselves changing (or from my own inferencing: growing), using

terms such as ‘be myself’. The subtheme *Student Identity* does not necessarily refer to the students’ cultural identity but their personality, how they described themselves and who they are as people. I will detail below how students spoke about *Student Identity* and experiences with RISE in relation to *New Experiences & Open Mindedness*, *Building Confidence* and *Diversity*.

In this section I should explain that a part of SEL-informed RISE programming was going on field trips and doing activities in the larger community (the city of Portland rather than the immigrant/refugee community specifically). The intention was to help them feel comfortable in their new home city, get them involved and create inclusion. Examples of field trips and activities are visiting the Oregon Coast, which was often the first time many students saw the ocean or beach, painting murals with artist organizations or recording podcasts with local organizations in the city. At least half of the students I interviewed were a part of all these above-mentioned activities, and the rest had participated in at least one. Students spoke highly of field trips and these activities they experienced at RISE and often connected it with becoming more open minded and gave differing examples of how it helped them with their identity.

While discussing different field trips and activities, students mentioned many things relating back to their personal identity and to *Student Identity*. For example, students described field trips helping them realize things about themselves and their personalities, such as their likes and their dislikes, due to these new experiences. Students reported benefiting from *New Experiences & Open Mindedness* and related it back to *Student Identity*. Diaco expressed gratitude for how *New Experiences & Open Mindedness* contributed to his character, “I think this is, this has been the best thing that has happened to me to be honest since I ever came here to the United States. [...] I think even my point of view on the world right now has changed, to be honest...I think that's now something changed and opened my mind. I think when you live in what we call, like, a bubble, [...] I would say in one country, um, all you take is from the media and that’s all, right? Now I want to go and visit these countries, I want to, to go and to the places that I never thought I would visit because of certain ideas that were put to our mind when we’re kids in, in, our home countries.” Diaco described how he has grown through his new experiences in RISE, how he feels he has benefited from developing open mindedness and how exposure to *Diversity* has helped him. Ahmed, who had attended all field trips and

was a part of the leadership team, described the new experiences at RISE, learning about different cultures from his peers and the volunteer tutors, as something that ‘elevated’ him. Ahmed also described how the *New Experiences & Open Mindedness* he gained felt empowering to him, “It’s really empowering to have such a variety of life experiences in that. That in college I appreciate even more, I’m able to connect with different folks in a different levels because of some of those experiences I had. [...] ...it increases my open mindedness allows you to just not really stuck in this box, and to see the world how full and how beautiful it is.” Ahmed is connecting *New Experiences & Open Mindedness* to *Empowerment* in his account *Empowerment* is related to *Student Identity* and also requires *Building Confidence* to develop; students also reported often on the confidence they gained from RISE.

In addition to *New Experiences & Open Mindedness* influencing *Student Identity*, a large component students reported benefiting from was *Building Confidence*. Abdullahi describes how he believes RISE is a place for *Building Confidence*, “And then you just build this confidence of you’re able to do things and that like people believe in you. [...] So, I think that’s a place that they can, like, go to and [...] feel like, get confident, about school about themselves.” When Abdullahi describes confidence, it is not only as a tool for school but also ‘about themselves’, this is an important aspect of helping students realize their own identity, when they can have the confidence and feel comfortable in their identity. Confidence was reported by the students when they would describe how *Building Confidence* in RISE helped them in other environments as well. Students described using SEL activities they learned at RISE outside of RISE to help them talk to strangers or cope with an experience that was anxiety inducing. Many students also used the words ‘confidence’ in addition to ‘empower’, ‘be themselves’ and ‘extrovert’ to describe their process of *Building Confidence*.

In the presence of *Diversity* there was this common saying or feeling of ‘we are all in the same boat’ or ‘going through the same struggle’. This was when the student would be speaking about *Diversity* specifically with other peers and feeling comfortable being themselves. This is how *Diversity* was coded separately from a similar code, *Cultural Exchange*, and why it is unique to *Student Identity*, because of the way students spoke of *Diversity*. The presence of *Diversity* in the RISE group, ‘not being the odd one out’ helped the students ‘be somebody’ when arriving to their new country and learning their new language. As Bintang describes, “I

only started learning [English] after I came here. So there wasn't like this like, barrier or anything [in RISE], because everyone felt the same as me. I feel like everyone went there to be somebody. [...] Being around a lot of diverse people doesn't really put a barrier, I feel like it puts more of a connection, a connection where like, you know, that they had their struggles, and you had yours.” The students were arriving to a new country [the US] where they were not born, and where the majority of other students were not like them, and they did not feel like they belonged there. Students talked about how they were able to relate to each other and feel connected to the other students because they were all from different places in a new country. The distinction of *Diversity* is when the students would talk specifically about each other, and not the adults in the room, and the important presence of having someone to relate to, going through the same struggle. It is very important for immigrant and refugee students to see their identities are present in order to feel like they have a place in their new home. Fatima describes her feelings with her peers at RISE compared to other environments, “I didn't feel like, [...]’Oh, I wish like, there was somebody like me, that I can relate to or they can relate to me or like we can share our struggles with’... And I had that [feeling] in university and I felt that way in different areas in life. But when it came to RISE, it honestly never felt like that.” The students having someone they can relate to in the presence of *Diversity* is important for them in developing their *Student Identity* in a new home country where most people are not like them.

Seeing their immigrant and refugee identity, with the complexities that entails, the struggles they are faced with, seeing that specific *Student Identity* they all can relate to, present, contributes positively to their *Empowerment*. These aspects of *Student Identity* all work towards *Empowerment* in different ways. The process of *New Experiences & Open Mindedness* and *Building Confidence* helps empower the student by giving them opportunities to discover themselves and their evolving identities. While the presence of *Diversity* and a feeling of inclusion help them feel present and thus empowered in their new home.

4.1.4 Relationships & Connections

The *Relationships & Connections* students made at RISE is almost overwhelming to try and summarize, because in their accounts it was so evidently clear how it made an impact on them. Students generally described *Community* in many ways when discussing individual

Relationships & Connections they made. Aziza put it simply, “The same way they treated me, the staff like you, the other tutor, like they were so welcoming to me all the time. It’s like a different type of family, RISE is always like a family.” Aziza described feeling welcomed by individuals and uses the word ‘family’ to describe the general feeling of *Community*. Students described RISE as welcoming and a place they would go even if they were not seeking academic or homework help, due to the *Community* aspect. Fatima claims she made more *Relationships & Connections* than she normally would have, “Because yeah socially, and honestly, I’ve made more friendships and more connections than I would have. [...] You guys made us feel like we were home. [...] I would say RISE is basically a family.” In Fatima’s account I hear that the *Community* feeling in RISE contributed to her ability to make friends and foster *Relationships & Connections*. In addition to using words such as home and family to describe feeling a part of a *Community*, students reported feelings included. Inclusion is an essential part of *Community*.

A unique aspect to the theme of *Relationships & Connections*, according to the students’ accounts, was the presence of *Cultural Exchange* in addition to the *Community* aspect. There was a connection for the students in learning about their peers and the volunteer tutors to support the feeling of *Community* at RISE. Bintang in the following excerpt talks about how he feels sharing about his culture with fellow students and tutors, “Overall, I feel like whenever I’ve talked about one of my culture, I feel like I could relate to one of the students or the tutors, and they could understand perfectly fine. I would rather have tutors that share their you know, their daily, daily struggles, daily hassles, daily excitement and joy and, like your personal life, even those, those build up, and we look up to them, you know.” Bintang described that he did not just seek academic support at RISE, but also the *Community* aspect and the connections between him and the students and tutors, which is supported by the *Cultural Exchange* that happens between them. Mariam said something similar and had described that learning about her peers’ cultures, how they speak, about the food they eat, had helped her to foster *Relationships & Connections*, and get to know her friends better. Speaking to the students about how the presence of multiple cultures present made them feel was important since they had reported not feeling comfortable in their new country in other ways. Descriptions of inclusiveness came up when speaking about *Cultural Exchange*, in a similar vein to how students would speak about inclusiveness in *Community*. Students would describe how at RISE

‘we are welcoming and celebrating’ cultural differences in the group and how everyone felt included. This feeling of inclusion is essential for the *Integration & Adaptation* of immigrant and refugee students. The way cultural differences were integrated into RISE and supported by SEL activities so that everyone got to know each other well, invoked a feeling of *Community* and appreciation for *Cultural Exchange*.

The last aspect of *Relationships & Connections* that is important to mention is how many students mentioned their appreciation for having *Someone to talk to*. The way students described having the adults as *Someone to talk to*, was different than having *Adult Mentorship*, because it did not include components of *Academic Success* as was previously discussed. The following contributions from students occurred when they were discussing the *Relationships & Connections* they had with the adults facilitating RISE, not necessarily the volunteer tutors or other peers. Students recount coming to RISE for emotional support, just to talk to the adult facilitators regarding anxiety or receiving advice. Imani describes how having *Someone to talk to*, supplemented *Relationships & Connections*, she wasn’t receiving at home, “I didn’t have my parents talking to me be like, “Okay, school, what would you guys learn?” [...] And we don’t see it as a problem. But, looking back at it [RISE], it’s like, that was more of a space where I could like, share how I was feeling that day. How I was feeling that week, how, you know, school was like, everything, basically...” Even with the support students had at home there was an appreciate still for having *Someone to talk to* at RISE. Aziza described her family being further from certain things in her life (such as school) and how she just wanted someone to listen to her, share happiness with or release and relieve stress. Many students described this phenomenon of coming to RISE just to have *Somone to talk to*, even if the adults could not solve the problem, the fact that they were there for them helped. Abdullahi described how the adults may not even know the overall affect it has on a kid, but to just be there is enough. Aziza mentioned a feeling of ‘releasing the burden of your heart’ while talking about hard things in SEL activities with adult facilitators at RISE.

Adaptation & Integration in a new country is going to be positively supported by a strong social network and an increase in *Relationships & Connections*. These positive *Relationships & Connections* the students are experiencing are going to help them feel comfortable and safe as themselves, and hopefully bring them joy, allowing them to adapt to their new circum-

stances and build resiliency. The *Community and Cultural Exchange* they feel at RISE or in school helps them integrate into their new schools and countries by showing them there is a place for them here and they can belong in this strange new place.

4.1.5 Respect & Care

The theme of *Respect & Care* was an interesting theme to emerge because it was from the codes *White people/American Culture* and *Adults Making Effort & Time* and in relation to how the students felt about whether or not their culture as respected. This theme was less prominent than the others, included less codes, but produced interesting responses and material directly relevant to the research question and is integral to cultural sensitivity.

Students expressed that whether it was the adult facilitators or volunteer tutors, they appreciated and noticed *Adults Making Effort & Time* to be there for them. Including the *Adults Making Effort & Time* to try to understand and respect their culture. In response to, ‘Did you feel your culture was respected at RISE?’ Ahmed answered, “Yes. Big yes. [...] When we go to field trip, you guys would make sure we have food that was different than the rest of the people. [...] A lot of time, we will take some time to pray and have a solitude moment. There was space that allowed us to do that. Yeah, culture was really expected, respected and understood. Much valued.” Ahmed’s comment shows how he felt his culture was respected because effort was made to accommodate students’ cultural needs, such as having appropriate food or prayer time. *Adults Making Effort & Time* was also reported in adults putting in effort in trying to understand their culture and making time to help them with their needs. Mariam described how the adults behaved understandingly with the students and how that created a protective barrier in which the cultural differences were never an issue, “You guys are like, super understanding. [...] Because there was never like a conflict. You know, it was it’s like, it’s like, I think our relationship was like, solid to the point like there’s there was nothing problem with it.” Mariam mentions how there was never conflict due to the strength of the relationships and how understanding the adults tried to be. The *Respect & Care* was felt and shown through *Adults Making Effort & Time* to help them in academics and understand their cultural backgrounds. Students reported noticing and appreciating the time they felt the adults took to try

and understand them, and how much patience and respect they felt from the adults' efforts.

The way students spoke about *White People/American Culture* was intriguing because it was one of the infrequent times in which results varied, making it important to note. Often in the interviews, the conversation would lead to students talking about how they felt working with white, Western tutors or facilitators versus non-white/Western tutors or volunteers. From these conversations, the two most extreme answers on opposite sides of the spectrum were, “I always prefer white people to be honest...” from Massawa, and “Yeah, I somehow feel more relaxed when I talk to another Asian tutor. I hope it doesn't sound racism but I do feel that way...” from Lian. Massawa explained further her feelings on working with *White People/American Culture*, “I like because the thing is white people are more open to listen like and everything for them is like, interesting. If we you put our culture you don't feel comfortable because you know them what they're gonna do or what's gonna say.” Here Massawa is describing feeling more comfortable with *White People/American Culture* because she knows what to expect from her own culture, and she sees white/Western culture as more open. She confirmed with me she felt her culture was respected when I asked her directly, she also told me she felt comfortable sharing her opinion and did not feel like there was a standard for students to automatically take the adults opinions. On the other side, Lian did admit that she would like to see more representation in the adult demographics, “...with the tutors for representation like with connection with the students would be very good.” Lian also stated that it did not necessarily have to be someone from her country exactly, but having more Asian tutors in general would help her feel more comfortable. While the *Respect & Care* put into interactions and relationships between the students and adults can be a protective factor for the students culturally, there can also be a benefit from representation and diversity, as has Lian identified. An increase in variety in the adults' cultural backgrounds would be a positive contribution to the RISE program in many ways.

Many of the other students reported positively about how their culture was respected with the white tutors and facilitators. Many students even seemed confused by the question of whether or not they felt their culture was respected at RISE, because maybe it felt obvious to them that there was nothing wrong. Bintang spoke about the presence of *White People/American Culture* in RISE and brings it back to *Adults Making Effort & Time* with a comment about con-

necting with another white facilitator and how her knowledge of his cultural food and customs made it easier for them to understand each other. Other students did not report noticing the cultural differences between the facilitators and themselves, saying things such as they saw us as 'one of them' and stating that we 'blended in' well with them (the students). The students describing us (the Western facilitators) as 'blending in' with them or as 'one of them' was a positive sign, because rather than the students describing their struggles to fit in with the norms of Western culture, they saw RISE as their place where we (the Western facilitators) had to fit in with them. With *Respect & Care*, important factors reported by the immigrant and refugee students in feeling like their culture was respected with *White People/American Culture* was *Adults Making Effort & Time*.

To conclude, *Adults Making Effort & Time* to include the students, to understand them directly relates to how easily it will be for the students to integrate. The students feeling like the *White People/American Culture* honors their presence and respects their background will make the *Intergration & Adaptation* process easier for them because they see that the environment is willing to include them, integrate them, and the *Respect & Care* put into the interactions and relationships helps the students emotionally adapt to their new situation.

4.1.6 Home Culture & Family

The last theme I want to discuss that I found from the interview transcripts is *Home Culture & Family*, which relates to *Student Identity* because it includes students discussing where they are from, but the distinction is in how students spoke about *Identifying with Multiple Cultures* and how it was complicated for them to navigate. The theme of *Home Culture & Family* is also present and separate from *Student Identity* because it includes where the students themselves gave me suggestions in how they thought RISE could be improved upon, through their *Desire to include families*.

Findings from *Identifying with Multiple Cultures* are less straight forward than some of my other Findings in that this aspect is important because it touches upon where the students are coming from and their histories, rather than their lived experiences now as immigrant and refugee students. While disclosing *Identifying with Multiple Cultures* the students didn't al-

ways know how to talk about it clearly or explain how it made them feel, but it seemed to make them feel some type of difficulty. Imani tried to explain it to me, “It’s a little bit kind of hard to, you know, decide which country you want to... Because you have like a culture from this country...and then you have a culture from this country. [...] So I don’t know. I always get stuck. [...] I don’t know what am I doing? What am I like? Where do I like, what side am I leaning towards more? [...] There was like a some sort of a guilt, a guilt that I was feeling. [...] Both countries are like, they have my heart and I don’t want to pick and choose...” While Imani is describing a part of her identity, she is using words like ‘guilt’ and clearly struggling to describe how she feels navigating this part of herself and her *Home Culture & Family*. Students would also use words such as ‘culture shock’ when describing how to represent and feel about their identities now in the US. Some students spoke about learning things from other students about their own culture, if they were born as a refugee in a different country that where their family is from and had never been to their home country, they might learn something about their home culture from other students in the group. I have chosen to code this portion with *Identifying with Multiple Cultures* and eventually placing it in the theme of *Home Culture & Family* because of the lack of a conclusive ‘point’ made. It is an observation on my part as the researcher and remains somewhat inconclusive, but important. A part of the reason it is important to make this distinction as the researcher is because of the nature of my research, I need to acknowledge where the students are coming from and how they talk about their *Home Culture & Family* even when it is mentioned unharmoniously from the other codes or themes but is relevant to the ultimate research question. I can conclude that the students are coming from diverse and complicated backgrounds when arriving to the US and it is important to not assume anything about them and their histories.

Another aspect of *Home Culture & Family* that came up was how several students expressed a *Desire to Include Families*. It’s important to know for this section that many students had parents who did not go to any school (except for maybe religious school), who did not speak English and usually were illiterate in their native language. This is something the students did not disclose in the interviews but something I know due to working closely with families and school administration for over 5 years. Students openly talked about how coming from an immigrant or refugee family sometimes felt like a disadvantage because their parents didn’t speak the language or understand the school system. For these reasons students expressed a

Desire to Include Families in RISE or in their larger academic experience. Abdullahi also spoke enthusiastically to this point, “Having families included, in a way, keeping them updated about progress stuff. I feel like one thing that’s like lacking in the community is, you know, it’s, it’s not the parents fault. [...] Maybe RISE could do something like parents and stuff, like getting to know the parents and then kind of getting an idea of what kind of family the kids come from, and how their situation is better understanding of their situation and like what they need. Different kids need certain, like, certain way of helping.” Abdullahi brings up a lot to unpack, such as the lack of connection between the immigrant and refugee adults and students. His claim is also supported by the fact he was not the only student to bring this up, many students commented that there was a disconnection between their families and their school lives that could be helped. But there is also a piece in this excerpt about understanding where the students are coming from as well. Implying that including families could help the adults at school who work with the students to understand the community better as a whole. Abdullahi’s last point that different kids may need a certain type of help is precise in identifying a deficit within education and one of my motivations for my research. My research is trying to understand how different types of students (immigrant or refugee students) respond to different types of education (SEL) and what makes education work well when there are these differences (cultural differences) and Abdullahi’s contribution is appreciated.

The process of *Integration & Adaptation* happens when supportive environments and relationships are in place. The findings in this theme illuminate the process as it works from the receiving environment and as the student participates. The *Relationships & Connections* provide a hospitable environment for integration as well as helping the students feel comfortable adapting. *Respect & Care* is necessary for the *Relationships & Connections* to work well in the *Integration & Adaptation* process and for the students to feel seen. While *Home Culture & Family* requires more effort on both parties, as it requires the students recognizing how they wish to include this part of their heritage as well as a circumstance in their new country that allows them to integrate. Finding the students had a *Desire to Include Families* and were coming from complicated background by *Identifying with Multiple Cultures*, illuminates the importance to aid in the *Intergration & Adaptation* during SEL education and the possibilities for improvement.

4.2 Observations

The findings from observations are complimentary to the literature previously outlined for SEL instruction and support the findings from interviews but are also independent in their own importance and illuminate the other side of SEL in practice, with more of a focus on the adults' role and participation. The following findings also play a more active role in reflecting upon the foundation behind SEL (such as classroom management/culture) and content of SEL (such as curriculum and activities). The act of observing required me to reflect on my own participation as a facilitator and more thoroughly include this piece in my research. The analysis and findings of the following observational data attempts to represent important points the students have already outlined, but from the side on the educator's role in SEL.

Due to my history and experience with SEL instruction in RISE, the observations will include my personal interpretations and reflections on the observational findings. I was playing an active role while taking field notes and observations and my experiences elicit knowledge-driven interpretations. Findings from my observations were categorized in the following themes: *Facilitation, Discipline and Activities.*

4.2.1 Facilitation

Educators and facilitators require a level of training and education to be effective for themselves and the students in the classroom, but these observations are focused on specific and broad actions that can be taken with students in addition to any previous experience and training. The codes adhering to the theme of *Facilitation* are *Execution of Plan, Being on the 'same page', and Minimal Distractions.* The code *Execution of Plan* refers to the curriculum that is built and executed by the adult facilitators.

In my observations and experiences, SEL curriculum and *Execution of the Plan* in every session were most effective when each facilitator had a part in creating the overall plan and were well informed and familiar with all the activities and games which were to be done in the session. There is room in any lesson plan for on-site adjustments in real-time if needed, but my observation and experiences found that the flow of the session and program was much smoother when it was not planned last minute and when both facilitators had gotten to choose

activities they were comfortable with and enjoyed facilitating. This provided an overall better experience for the students and facilitators themselves, to have a well-informed plan and structure in sessions. These plans do not need to be too complex but having a well-formulated plan and being aware of it helped the facilitators manage the energy in the room, including any surprises or sudden changes regarding the students. For example, having the sign-up sheet for students ready and clear or having the room set up (circle of chairs in the middle) before students arrive so they can enter and be prepared for the activity, or if need be tasking the students with help setting up and getting signed in.

Facilitation also includes a foundation of facilitators *Being on the 'same page'* to the classroom culture and individual actions they would take with the students. As a rule of thumb in RISE, facilitators would greet every student that entered the room, even when speaking with another student, a simple nod or wave was always given to the arriving student. It is important for both or all adult facilitators to be aware of the expectations of each other so that an unfair burden was not placed on either of the facilitators and the relationships between the adults and students was given equal opportunity to develop. It is normal for certain students to naturally gravitate and bond with specific adults they work with yet *Being on the 'same page'* in terms of behavior, actions and expectations not only fosters a comfortable environment for all students but also displays the expected respect that we all give each other. Different educators and facilitators working together could have different ideologies and styles of working with students, but with SEL the standard procedure in adult behavior helps avoid a 'bad cop/good cop' situation which could place facilitators in an uncomfortable or unfair situation of carrying more of the emotional behavior with students. While adult facilitators will appropriately take different roles, such as a licensed therapist running the SEL groups, the everyday behaviors and overall classroom culture can be shared and used as an example as the expected behavior.

Another good example of a small behavior, that may seem obvious but is not necessarily and is a small easy adjustment most adults can make is *Minimal Distractions*. Of course, this does not include special situations or emergency cases, but from my observations *Minimal Distractions* help the students and adults stay present and focused. Adult facilitators staying off their devices (phones and computers) as much as they can is beneficial because the lack of devices

avoids triggering students to also desire being on their own devices and helps everyone stay engaged. In school and daily life in general, it is easy and understandable that students and adults handle many responsibilities and are susceptible to distractions constantly. Creating an environment that will foster SEL and SEC growth includes creating a group dynamic that feels ‘special’ or ‘different’ than daily life and daily stressors, an easy way to enact this philosophy is minimizing small things that can cause stress and anxiety (such as devices). *Minimal Distractions* such as staying off devices or avoiding complicated multitasking simplifies the whole experience. *Minimal Distractions* works together with *Execution of Plan* such as if a student interrupts a game or activity to try and do homework or raise another concern, facilitators can communicate to the student of the order of activities for the day and assure them they will make time to talk about their concern, after the activity or once everyone is taken care of and given a task (whatever the specific situation entails). The well-coordinated *Execution of Plan* and *Being on the ‘same page’* on the part of the facilitators creates a structure for sessions and the program that the students get used to and becomes safe for the students because they learn what to expect and how to act in this environment. This structure also supports the next theme, *Discipline*.

4.2.2 Discipline

Discipline is one of the hardest parts of teaching and working with students. Though there is no perfect solution and different circumstances require different knowledge or special attention, in my observations there are Findings that can help adults and are ultimately beneficial to students. This is specific to immigrant and refugee students in an SEL-informed context. Student disruption or disruptive behaviors are common in school and difficult to avoid but deeming *Disruptions not inherently ‘bad’* helps the students learn expectations through positivity rather than negativity. From my observations, when a disruptive student would interrupt an activity, it was helpful when the adults would acknowledge what they are saying or doing rather than shutting them down or scolding their behavior as negative, then re-direct with a reminder about what the task at hand is or what the group is doing together. When working with multiple cultures there are different standards to how to behave and though the dominant culture (in this case the US) has expected behaviors, it should not be assumed all students are aware or even capable of these standards of behavior. In my observations it was clear different students had different needs, due to differing physical and learning abilities. For example,

disruptive behavior in some cases may have been due to a physical disability, such as not wanting or being able to participate in a game. Rather than scolding a student or telling them they can/cannot do something (especially because the facilitator may not be aware of this differing ability), I observed facilitators at RISE giving students another role in the activity or allowing them exceptions in terms of needs (taking breaks for water/food or communicating in the activity in another way). I observed that this comforted the students and allowed them to feel comfortable re-entering the activity in another way or gave them the autonomy to communicate what they need, such as taking a break.

In addition to *Disruption not inherently 'bad'* allowing *Multiple Languages* in the classroom is crucial to working with immigrant and refugee students. Enforcing *Discipline* for language from the perspective of observation is not necessary. In my observations RISE functioned completely in English but allowed students to communicate with each other, and adults (if applicable), in their native languages to an extent and this created an environment of acceptance. Due to the fact RISE was comprised of immigrant and refugee students from many different countries, the presence of communal languages was not very common but welcomed and celebrated. RISE would also include the ability to incorporate the students' languages into the games and activities. For example, one of the warm-up games was a ball-toss game that included welcoming each other in whatever language the participants wanted and learning each other's names. This game was easy for students even with low English levels to participate in and feel accomplished in because it met them where they were with their language and had an easy learning requirement of learning one person's name at a time. Including and welcoming *Multiple Languages* in the RISE program helped ease the students into feeling comfortable with their English language abilities and did not create a culture of dominance and *Discipline* with the English-speaking culture around them.

Another way I observed RISE creating a culture of acceptance and establishing democracy-like *Discipline* was in the practice to *Include students in Rule Making*. Before we started our RISE 'Better Together' group sessions with the students we (the facilitators) presented 'Community Agreements' that we prepared. We presented them and explained them and then invited students to add anything they needed to feel comfortable or seen while we had our sessions together. Creating 'Community Agreements' together helped the students know that

they can advocate for themselves and ask things of us, the adults. At the beginning of every session, we would also briefly go over the 'Community Agreements' and allow students to add to them at any time. Though it is uncommon for students to feel comfortable adding to the 'Community Agreements' right away, this is why we open the conversation back up in case students realize there is anything they need. The 'Community Agreements' we made in the RISE 'Better Together' SEL group were more detailed in-depth than the ones we use for regular RISE programming. Observed in the RISE after school sessions the 'Community Agreements' became more than guidelines or a replacement for rules or *Discipline* and became a unifier for group culture.

The 'Community Agreements' created for RISE are a good example showing a connection between *Facilitation* and *Discipline* and how *Facilitation* can be a tool to a form of classroom *Discipline*. To explain this further I will describe what I observed about the 'Community Agreements' and how they were used during my time observing. The five 'Community Agreements' for RISE were created by the adults and intentionally created to be used as a tool for connection. The five 'Community Agreements' are: 'Show Up', 'Chase Dreams', 'Be Kind', 'Give Respect' and 'Be You.' During high energy or harder days with the students the facilitators would speak to these five points and work with the students (those who were comfortable volunteering to describe or talk about them) to go over with the whole group. But normally, the 'Community Agreements' were used as a closing activity to end the daily SEL activities that the group would do together at the beginning of every session (Opening Circle), before getting into homework and academic help. After the Opening Circle, the students, adult volunteers and facilitators would sit in the circle and the adult facilitators would ask for five volunteers (adults or students) to participate in the closing. Each student (or adult) who volunteered would stand up, and in succession one student would shout the first word in one of the agreements, and the rest of the group would shout the second word. For example, a standing student shouts "Be!" and the rest of the group yells "Kind!" until the group has shouted all five sayings together. This signified the 'closing' of Opening Circle and time to start homework. Through the 'Community Agreements' the adult facilitators had a daily reminder for the students to know their expectations and thus being a form of *Discipline* in RISE. But the 'Community Agreements' also created cohesiveness in the group, as I observed every day the students were excited to volunteer to lead the 'Community Agreements' or even

had their favorite word they liked to volunteer for. This is an alternative form of *Discipline* that is supported by strong *Facilitation* and with this activity the adults' facilitators are creating a 'container', meaning the students know the patterns at RISE, come to 'Opening Circle', do the opening activities, close with 'Community Agreements' and then it's time for homework. Creating this pattern or 'container' helps foster a culture for the group, which leads me to my next important topics and theme of *Activities*.

4.2.3 Activities

The theme *Activities* refers to SEL-specific activities, but I have chosen to name the theme *Activities* for ease of writing. The codes and important aspects of *Activities* I observed in my time with RISE were the presence of *Low-risk Games*, *Variety & Flexibility*, *De-briefing & Processing* and *Personal Life Connection*. In the RISE 'Better Together' group the facilitator planned the curriculum so that every day started with *Low-risk Games*, for example a name game or get-to-know-you game. In the case of RISE, the after-school program *Low-Risk Games* would also include a game that was easy to do without a lot of English. In both groups I observed that these *Low-Risk Games* would get students laughing, learning about each other, learning English or give them 10-15 minutes of 'down-time' to relax by not have to engage with academics. *Low-risk Games* at the beginning of each session acted as a warm-up and signified to the students we are starting our session together. In addition to *Low-risk Games*, *Variety & Flexibility* in the *Activities* also seemed to help the students with accessibility, meaning the students felt games were more accessible or easy to do, when there were options or alteration made where needed. Many of the *Activities* the facilitator for RISE 'Better Together' created for the daily curriculum included *Variety & Flexibility*, meaning many options for participation. For example, there were several art-based activities we would do to talk about stress, such as drawing, painting, or even writing how stress feels in the body. Any time there was an art-based activity there were plenty of options for how the students could participate, colored pencils, watercolors, pastels or if they preferred, they had the option to write or read. Another example is that often there would be large-group discussion and small-group discussion. I observed in these two group discussions that different students would be more likely to share in different groups. Having both group discussions might seem unnecessary, but it allowed different types of students to have the opportunity to share however they felt most comfortable. In having *Variety & Flexibility* in the activities, this also includes listening

to the student suggestions and allowing them to express themselves or change the requirements of the games if needed. For example, I observed that if a student needed help feeling comfortable sitting in a large group, they were allowed to have a fidget or something to do with their hands if they needed to, or if having a task to do, such as being the photographer in a photography project rather than the photographed, those adjustments were made.

Throughout the RISE groups I observed how the facilitators created a ‘container’ for the program's sessions, meaning that the sessions had a clear pattern to how the daily session would go: opening/check-in activities, when those activities were over, and most importantly in the RISE ‘Better Together’ group, *De-briefing & Processing* activities to close the day. The *De-briefing & Processing* activities would usually be individual journaling while listening to calming music, with options to draw if needed or a small group discussion. The *De-briefing & Processing* did not always look the same, sometimes it was very open, and students could share or write to the large group whatever they wanted to, or they would have journaling/conversation prompts to guide them through. During more content heavy days in the RISE ‘Better Together’ group the facilitator would guide students through a meditation and students would sit wherever they liked comfortably and listen. *De-briefing & Processing* was a very important aspect of the sessions that included a lot of SEL content from sharing personal stories to learning about stress and anxiety. When discussing heavy issues or sharing a lot about one's personal lives it would be irresponsible of the facilitators to ask the students to participate without also facilitating that *De-briefing & Processing* experience. From my observations the *De-briefing & Processing* would also include students to be silent and take a break between the sessions and going back to regular school or going home. Sometimes even the more energetic students would seem more relaxed and at-ease after these activities, those who before needed a task, fidget or got distracted often.

The last code and aspect of this theme is *Personal Life Connection*. In many of the sessions the adult facilitators included *Activities* that gave the students the opportunity to share about their personal lives or included aspects pertaining to their personal lives creating a *Personal Life Connection* between the students and the program and content. *Activities* that create this connection included a ‘Growth Zone’ activity in which the adult facilitators read out prompts of different scenarios and students moved themselves accordingly to a ‘Panic Zone’, ‘Growth

Zone' or 'Comfort Zone' and then had the option to share out their experiences/opinions or even ask the group prompts themselves. Other *Activities* would incorporate their first languages or content that was specific to teenagers' lives and development. Common *Activities* we used at RISE included a 'Photo Voice' project in which students had the prompts to take a photo on their phone or share a photo they had on their phone of something that was important to them from their home or family life. Some of the *Activities* also included creating things in our sessions that they could take home with them that was about the SEL content, such as a 'Self Care Menu' we created in our sessions that included advice and things they can do at home when they are feeling sad or stressed and to remind them of things they learned in our sessions.

The themes found from observation, *Facilitation*, *Discipline* and *Activities* relate to established previous interview findings by outlining ways in which a SEL program can be successful. For example, through effective *Facilitation* and *Discipline* an educator can create healthy and supportive classroom culture and norms, which would be directly supported and made more fruitful by positive *Relationships & Connections* between the group members and *Respect & Care* being communicated from the adults to the students. In Discussion, I will explore further how the Findings from the interviews and observations connect to each other as well as the literature.

To conclude, these themes are what I observed being present that made a difference in the students' ability to be comfortable and participate in SEL activities. From my perspective the adult facilitators utilized the aspects outlined in these themes to create an atmosphere (to the best of their abilities) that would foster the student's growth and advocacy. Though the data analysis from observations did not yield much in terms of culturally specific Findings compared to interview Findings, I believe the findings summarized well how to use SEL intentionally so that it is appropriate for all students, including students with differing backgrounds (marginalized or minority communities). The themes *Facilitation*, *Discipline* and *Activities* also work in a circular fashion in which they support one another, they exist apart from each other but the presence of all of them (and the aspects within them) help the others function well

5. Discussion

By asking, “How can SEL be culturally appropriate and effective with immigrant and refugee high school youth?” this research project outlines the basic structure of SEL, highlights culturally specific concerns with SEL and advises how SEL can be used with the immigrant and refugee youth demographic. From the literature review, observational data and interview data findings, I would like to conclude that SEL can be culturally appropriate, sensitive and effective with this group of youth, under the circumstances that it is created and executed with the ultimate themes of *Empowerment* and *Integration & Adaptation* throughout the process.

SEL programs can be appropriate and effective with immigrant and refugee youth if the environment is welcoming and encouraging of integration, including having opportunities for students to develop their abilities to adapt to their new home country, and supported by SEL-informed facilitators and activities to stimulate empowerment. The presence of well-trained, SEL-informed facilitators is key along with the SEL-based activities and protocol for the program or classroom. The educators and curriculum will lead to the necessary aspects of making SEL culturally inclusive, such as strong *Relationships & Connections* which supports every aspect of SEL and inclusiveness, clear *Respect & Care* for the students culture and intentions to help students develop their *Student Identity*. The adult facilitators have a lot of power to set the classroom culture, and they ultimately decide the curriculum and content of the day. However, the subthemes found support the adult facilitators abilities to perform well and make a significant difference in creating a culturally appropriate and effective SEL environment for the students. While adult facilitators ultimately hold the power in decision-making and curriculum, the necessary environment and extra supports need to be in place for them to enact culturally appropriate SEL. I will present how this is possible by connecting my findings from the data sets together where necessary and connecting the data back to the theoretical framework presented.

5.1 Connecting the data sets and theoretical framework

In the research findings from the interview data, subthemes found were ultimately categorized into two themes which can be used to succinctly summarize the fundamental goals of culturally appropriate and effective SEL. To structure this Discussion and in order to show how the data sets findings are aligned, the observational data findings will be categorized into the two

themes *Empowerment* and *Integration & Adaptation* along with the interview findings to guide the discussion through connections in the data sets and theoretical framework. The following image shows the two main themes I have found necessary to make SEL culturally appropriate and effective from the interviews (*Empowerment* and *Integration & Adaptation*) and how the themes from observational data (*Facilitation*, *Discipline* and *Activities*) fit into those aspects, along with aligned subthemes (from the interviews). The observational themes are in larger font for clarity, as they are the main subjects of the figure, and the subthemes from interview findings are included for orientation and reference.

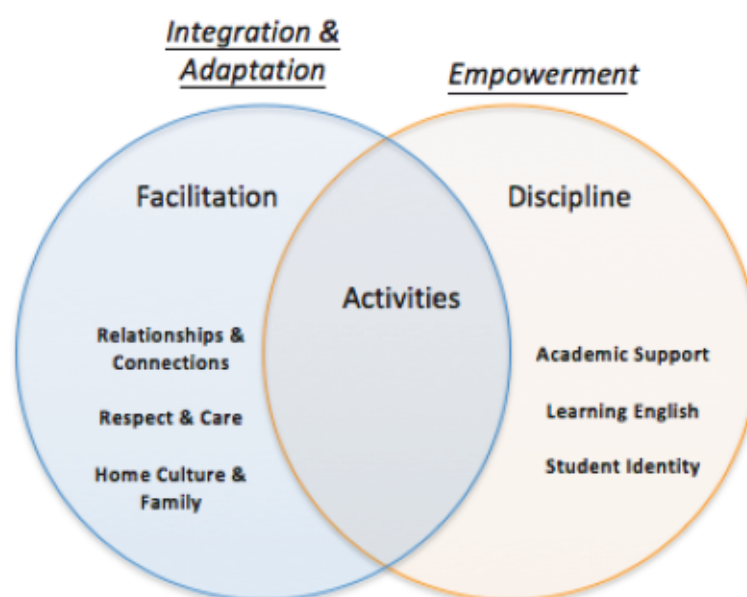


Figure 10 'Themes Diagram'

All the subthemes in bold together create the ultimate themes that make SEL culturally appropriate and effective, but the subthemes that are most important and exclusive in answering the research question will be highlighted in this Discussion. This structure for the Discussion is with the intention of framing how to present connecting themes from data sets and connecting those themes to the theoretical framework. I will explain the connections between the data sets in the following order: *Facilitation*, *Discipline* and *Activities*.

5.1.1 Facilitation of Integration & Adaptation

Facilitation performed by the adult facilitators as outlined in observational findings will assist in helping educators successfully execute SEL instruction and aid in *Integration & Adaptation* along with the themes from interview findings. Immigrant and refugee students are facing stress and discrimination among other disadvantages during their integration process, and the lack of community or social support further threatens their mental health and ability to handle such disadvantages (Simich, 2005, 260). Successful *Facilitation* of SEL programs is essential in their *Integration & Adaptation* process in their new schools. The existence and facilitation of pro-social intercultural peer programs are protective factors for immigrant and refugee students in school (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009, 421). Further, the *Facilitation* of such SEL programs is going to create strong *Relationships & Connections* for immigrant and refugee students to develop resiliency and navigate their acculturation process. Acculturation is the process of immigrant and refugee students learning to orientate between their host society and home heritage (Schwartz et al., 2013, 156). Resiliency is a tool students develop to successfully adapt despite challenges and adversity (Bernard, 1995, 4). SEL programs have been shown to provide effective intervention for youth in school settings and foster positive social and emotional development while also enhancing resiliency (LaBelle, 2019, 2). The peer-to-peer relationships are important in SEL and the adult facilitators and educators working in SEL need to create a nurturing learning environment through a student-centered approach to teaching and learning (Ibarra, 2022, 7). Yet, the role of teachers as sources of support and role models in the acculturation process for immigrant youth remains unclear (Oppedal & Roysamb, 2004, 490). The role of *Respect & Care* makes a significant difference in how immigrant and refugee students received the SEL program and *Facilitation* by adults, as reported by the students in the interviews. Addressing this lack of clarity, adult educators roles with immigrant and refugee students can potentially be another form of experiencing systemic discrimination, thus *Respect & Care* put in the facilitators role and their *Facilitation* is essential. SEL requires educators to practice mindfulness to improve and balance their own social-emotional needs without getting overwhelmed (Ibarra, 2022, 10).

Facilitation in SEL groups helps students create those protective mental health factors such as *Relationships & Connections* and provides protective mental health in an accessible way, at school. Immigrant and refugee families usually are concerned with more urgent needs before the mental health needs of youth. Yet, families value academic achievement and concerns in school are easily identifiable, thus making schools acceptable targets for additional programs

and services. (Ellis, 2011, 7273). Immigrant and refugee communities are more likely to access mental health through community members or teachers than through formal channels (Stiffman et al., 2004, 190). Unfamiliarity and distrust of the dominant system due to previous experiences of racism and xenophobia discourage families from seeking formal services, thus mental health promotion among immigrant and refugee youth requires an integrated approach to overcome existing hurdles (Ellis, 2011, 69). SEL programs at school allow students in need of mental health support to access such services easily, whereas otherwise they may not have this opportunity.

With the presence of SEL programs in school and strong *Facilitation* the students learn what to look for in terms of expected behavior, group norms and culture; students integrate and adapt to the SEL group, practice SEL skills safely and begin to build *Relationships & Connections* with their fellow peers and adults. Creating safe and orderly school environments through interpersonal and instructional supports in school produces better academic performance through caring teacher-student relationships that create a bond and commitment to school (Durlak et al., 2011, 418). Students in SEL sessions with strong *Facilitation* imitates an academic classroom environment but one in which they know how to participate in, thus they are learning to integrate and adapt to their new environment. Research has demonstrated that a positive school climate leads to fewer conflicts among students as well as improved academic outcomes (LaBelle, 2019, 4). The safety of being guided by strong *Facilitation* gives the students a space to observe and gain social awareness. Social awareness in the classroom is the ability to recognize social and cultural norms, therefore SEL programming and facilitation invokes this exchange in the classroom by collaborative discussion and incorporation of diverse perspectives in the classroom content (Cressey, 2020, 199; Osher et al., 2016, 664). With the adult facilitators providing *Facilitation* of the SEL program and steering the well-thought-out intentional sessions infused with *Respect & Care*, students can ideally relax and gain social awareness in participating and observing.

Students reported very positively overall regarding the *Relationships & Connections* they made due to RISE; these *Relationships & Connections* helped them through their academic experience because they were emotionally supported through the academic work and journey. These *Relationships & Connections* were also strong and possible because of the presence of *Respect & Care*. Due to the cultural differences between adults and students, *Respect & Care* being present in those relationships is essential to their effectiveness and affects every aspect

of the process. For example, I do not believe the students would have reported as many positive results in *Academic Success* if there was a lack of *Respect & Care* also present with *Relationships & Connections*, because the *Relationships & Connections* would have been weaker without that reported *Respect & Care*. When a student respects the educator and feels respected by the educators any and all *Discipline* in the classroom is going to be easier, if the *Respect & Care* is present and the *Relationships & Connections* are developed. The SEL-informed curriculum, content and activities prioritize creating opportunities for those relationships to grow, and continuous SEL fosters those positive relationships, essentially alleviating potential conflicts in the classroom.

5.1.2 Discipline as Empowerment

When recognizing what makes culturally appropriate and effective SEL-instruction, *Discipline* is one of the most important themes. *Discipline* is where the program and adult facilitators have the chance to avoid perpetuating the dominant cultures power over the immigrant and refugee students. When enacting *Discipline* in a classroom with immigrant and refugee students, it is important to note that part of the resettlement and migration experience often includes an abuse of power by authority in their home country or host country, and cases varying on severity (Ellis et al. 2011, 70). Immigrant and refugee students do not have the same history with authority and *Discipline* as mainstream students, and there is an inherent unfair power dynamic between the immigrant and refugee students and educator in the host country, moreso than the power dynamic with mainstream students. Educators focus on *Discipline* and authority in the classroom to establish control and order; the inclusion of SEL and CRT methods to co-create classroom culture and norms with the students is taking a democratic approach to authority instead of disciplinary and the educator is modeling long-term responsibility and sociopolitical engagement (Cressey, 2020, 198). Allowing multiple languages to be present in the classroom and allowing the students to cooperate in rulemaking are practices of *Empowerment* and are not excluding their *Student Identity* from the classroom experience but integrating it.

Helping immigrant students gain literacy and social skills is crucial, so the environment and instruction needs to be inclusive of newcomer and minority cultures (Li, 2010, 132). As established by students reports, *Learning English* requires a safe environment, one without the pre-assumption of native speaking abilities and strict guideline of how they can use their new language. Language acquisition is most effective in a natural and spontaneous social environ-

ment amongst peers (Li, 2010, 131). Immigrant and refugee students are already experiencing separation from mainstream students as well as different standards of treatment and assessment, which reflect and enforces a natural unfair separation in society and perpetuates discrimination (Li, 2010, 128-131). Therefore, it is important for SEL to provide an example of an alternative to issues of separation, mainstream tactics and *Discipline*. Agreeing upon 'rules' or community agreements together gives an opportunity to students to practice responsible decision making. By way of *Discipline* the facilitators and educators in the classroom can empower the students by creating a space where they are not assumed to be or behave in a certain way, but they can come as themselves and be a part of creating the classroom culture. SEL curriculum and SEL-informed forms of *Discipline* is an opportunity for educators to incorporate diverse perspectives and ideas in *Discipline* in all content areas (Cressey, 2020, 199). Learning goals and competencies can be used to set high expectations but with additional supports in place for immigrant and refugee students instead of strict inflexible standards or assessment measures (Beaty, 2018, 70).

When enacting *Discipline* and order, culturally responsive and SEL informed educators should refrain from restricting how their students speak up and out about unfairness in the classroom or deeming disruption behavior as inherently 'bad' (Cressey, 2020, 201). If educators focus on the students developing autonomy, ethics and a sense of self-discipline, such as in the practice of creating community agreement together, this naturally creates an environment where mutual respect, group decision making and cooperation are the norm (Elias, 2006, 3). The notion of *Discipline* to punish is embedded in Western society and ensures that potential wrongdoers comply to society's rules, in education a justice approach to *Discipline* is focusing on repairing harm done in relations rather than placing blame (Hopkins, 2022, 144). The goals of SEL can be rendered ineffective or detrimental if a teacher avoids discussing the sociopolitical and structural complexities that exist in teaching and learning (Cressey, 2020, 202). This is why it is important in *Discipline* for educators to not deem what they perceive as problematic behavior from students as inherently negative and inflect punishment.

Educators can promote expected behaviors and procedures while allowing students to resist injustice, speak truth to power and recognize when context calls for disobedience, which are skills needed to become a well-founded participatory citizen (Cressey, 2020, 216). In *Discipline* it is important that the implications of using SEL be clear to positively uplift diverse groups and their contributions to the collective wellbeing of community, the school, and glob-

ally (Jagers, 2016, 3). Resistance or disruptive behavior is an act of navigating freedom that can lead to *Empowerment* and well-being (Jagers, 2016, 2). An important critique of SEL to note, applicable to mainstream and newcomer youth, is that SEL methods and programming can promote assimilation rather than integration (Jagers, 2016, 2). From a young age students can recognize unfairness and call out injustice; exploring these thoughts and feelings while encouraging the development of the skill and mindset is exceptionally important to students from historically marginalized groups (Cressey, 2020, 197). Specifically for disenfranchised youth (immigrant, refugee and POC or identity-minority youth), learning how to advocate for justice and speak out in a safe environment, such as their school or community, may be an important survival skill and strength essential for them in the future (ibid).

The process of *Empowerment* is not as straight forward for immigrant and refugee students as it is for mainstream students, the presence of *Integration & Adaptation* interacts with aspects of *Empowerment* in essential ways. *Academic Success* and *Learning English* proved to be two very important aspects of the students' lives, based on how frequently they mentioned both these topics, but I believe these two subthemes being present would have not been as effective without the other subthemes of *Relationships & Connections* and *Respect & Care*. *Academic Success* was not only about passing classes and getting good grades but also the access to resources and especially the accessibility to college that it gave the students (*Accessing Resources & Opportunities*). Subsequently we saw the students talk about the future while talking about *Academic Success* and indicating it has led them to more future options in life (*Motivation & Future Goals*). The adult facilitator's role was significant in leading to *Academic Success (Adult Mentorship)*. However, the adult facilitators effectiveness in the students' *Academic Success* and *Learning English* was directly supported by the strong *Relationships & Connections*. In the RISE program *Relationships & Connections* were reported on being strong in many ways, these *Relationships & Connections* were made stronger by the presence of SEL-informed curriculum, activities, games and classroom culture. Such as making the SEL program accessible to all the students no matter their English level or comfortability, allowing them to participate in the group and have the option to get to know one another or share something about themselves.

This can also be said for *Learning English* but it is more complex. *Learning English* is a part of the *Empowerment* process for students in their new home country because it is the dominant cultures language, and it will help them navigate the rest of their lives. It is likely that the

positive *Relationships & Connections* contributed to *Learning English* as well, but I believe that the students were also being supported as themselves and their *Student Identity* which allowed them to feel more comfortable in their *Learning English* journey. With the opportunity to develop their *Student Identity* students are more likely to feel *Empowerment*, which may alleviate other aspects the students are struggling with, such as *Academic Success* and *Learning English*. This process of *Empowerment* for immigrant and refugee students is supported directly by *Integration & Adaptation*, such as in the form of *Relationships & Connections*.

Language acquisition and acculturation, or adaptation, had been found to be most effective in a natural environment that provokes a natural social interaction amongst peers (Li, 2010, 131). My findings supported the creation of a safe space that was constructed of native speakers (adult facilitators and adult volunteer tutors) and a diverse group of language learners. This space was diverse, non-judgmental and utilized activities specifically aimed at helping create a fun and natural social setting in which language practice would feel easier and more natural for the learners.

5.1.3 Activities under Empowerment and Integration & Adaptation

Activities were found to be applicable under the theme of *Empowerment* as well as *Integration & Adaptation*; considering that the *Activities* provided were: accessible, adaptable for the students, provided opportunities to explore and share their personal lives and experiences. There was variety and flexibility in *Activities* that made them accessible to any of the students. Specific SEL *Activities* were also aimed at stimulating personal growth, development of *Student Identity* and sharing their stories. With SEL curriculum and *Activities*, students learn to treat themselves with kindness when distressed and confronted by harmful negative dialogue or self-criticism in the face of difficulties (Biber, 2019, 27). The capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively and establish positive relationships in life are a beneficial competency that is essential for all students (Elias, 2009, 1). While SEL *Activities* are actively working towards *Empowerment* of the *Student Identity* with social-emotional skills, they are also actively creating *Relationships & Connections*. Newcomers need these activities to rebuild disrupted social support networks and avoid isolation (Simich, 2005, 260). Rebuilding social support networks psychosocially aid students' development in a new country (Tsai, 2006, 262). Social support networks are sources of empowerment, integration, problem solving and reducing stress (Simich, 2005, 260).

Activities that develop social competencies are sources of individual identity exploration, development of cultural knowledge and skills important in the *Integration & Adaptation* process (Oppedal et al., 2004, 481-482). Social support will help students cope with stress in crisis situations, *Integration & Adaptation* and build the self-confidence necessary to lead to *Empowerment* (Simich, 2005, 260). Self-esteem and confidence mediate mental health interactions in the face of negative socioenvironmental experiences and combat students at-risk of seeking validity in groups such as gangs (Rossiter, 2009, 425). The support must come from both friends and family, a lack of ethnic competencies yields strong negative effects on mental health (Oppedal et al., 2004, 490). Options for immigrant and refugee youth to continue to participate in their home culture in their new environment need to exist to avoid feelings of identity confusion or rejection by home heritage, further marginalizing a marginalized group (Schwartz et al., 2013, 162). *Activities* that include a *Personal Life Connection* aid in this process.

Positive *Relationships & Connections* with teachers and educators are a part of the social support network that aid and protects students, yet on the other hand some educators also perpetuate institutionalized discrimination (Oppedal et al., 2004, 490). Expectations are often lowered for certain students based on the educators perception of the students limitation, without realizing this is implicit or unconscious biases of these students (Cressey, 2020, 198). A nurturing learning environment can include additional support for students experiencing academic concerns and practical praise including student input and collaborative choices that contribute to student's individual empowerment and a sense of belonging (Ibarra, 2022, 7). *Variety & Flexibility in Activities* can supplement an educators desire to lower expectation and incorporate collaborative choices to create extra supports needed and nurturing learning environment. School-wide approaches can also encourage further collaboration of families and parents to deepen understanding and communication about the students needs (Cressey, 2020, 200).

From school-wide policies to singular classroom practices, educators can infuse SEL *Activities* to create time for personal sharing or *Debriefing & Processing* to connect their content to the real emotional lives of their students, thereby increasing personal engagement from the students (Cressey, 2020, 201). When students feel essential and important to the group, they also feel responsible in upholding community and upholding classroom culture (Ibarra, 2022, 10). In a SEL classroom, teachers need to create an environment where students know they are cared about (Yoder, 2014, 13). SEL can actively work against reinforcing social norms of

the dominant culture by exploring cultural sensitivities, implicit bias and using SEL with diverse groups of students (Cressey, 2020, 201). Immigrant and refugee students have reported feeling their culture and previous lives was either excluded from school material or spoken about negatively (Li, 2010, 128). SEL services for immigrant and refugee youth must be developed by being mindful of the history and experience of refugees (Ellis, 2011, 70). Curriculum can be built to include diverse representations and references including many cultures of different groups of people, without spotlighting or ‘studying’ specific groups as an outsider, the students' identities need to be considered within the larger macro sociocultural context of the experience (Cressey, 2020, 198; Tsai, 2006, 285). The process of using *Personal Life Connection* in curriculum and *De-briefing and Processing* time in *Activities* can aid in these concerns.

Observation found that *Activities with Personal Life Connection* increased students' likelihood to engage and participate in the activity, reported from interviews to help in feelings of presence and *Student Identity*. Found in the literature to support observations findings was the claim that the most effective SEL educators connected their classroom content with real life experiences or the emotional lives of students, which led to increased motivation and engagement (Cressey, 2020, 201). Findings from my observations and interviews support the claims made by previous SEL research I presented in the theoretical framework. From the interview data students reported feeling supported emotionally and academically and expressed a feeling of community and inclusion. Observational findings found the importance of the student's participation in this education space and community as well. A nurturing learning environment includes praise, allows frequent student unput and collaborative choices that help increase *Empowerment* and students feeling belonging (Ibarra, 2022, 7).

There was already existing research demonstrating that the positive school climate and environment better school outcomes, with the suggestion of additional resources to meet high expectations (Beaty, 2018, 70; LaBelle, 2019, 4). The findings from my observations complimented what I had learned from the literature. When students have options, flexibility and choices in games, activities and the tasks they were doing, they were very likely to complete the activity or task, even if they had shown resistant behavior to the activity, when they were given more resources or options to complete the activity or task at hand, it was likely to be done.

One of the key claims and goals of SEL is that the interpersonal support and additional inclusion of social-emotional instruction will thus produce better academic outcomes and performance from the students through better *Relationships & Connections* (Durlak et.al, 2011, 418; LaBelle, 2019, 4). The findings from the interviews directly supported this assertion made by Durlak (2011) and LaBelle (2019) (as well as many other scholars) but goes further into why those *Relationships & Connections* lead to *Academic Success*. The interpersonal supports in the form of mentorships and the creation of a space specifically for the immigrant and refugee youth not only helps them feel comfortable existing in their new school but also allows them to feel safe making mistakes, practicing their new language and leads to increased access to resources. The fusing of SEL-activities, games and relationships with the school environment provided a space for the students to always go to after school to solve their academic concerns and bettered their chances of passing classes and graduating high school.

5.2 Concerns for Educators

In this research project, the findings emanating from observations and interview data appear to put a lot of pressure and responsibility on the teachers, educators and SEL facilitators. Educators social-emotional competence is a necessity and concern in the process of implementing SEL and requires continuous professional development by educators (Ibarra, 2022, 10). Teachers are historically and globally already overworked, exploited and burnt-out, so an additional and emotional responsibility such as this one can be too much. The goal of some of the more practical findings from observation and interview data was to try and illuminate how SEL is accessible to all and any educators, as it does not necessarily require an additional set of knowledge but intentionality and care more than anything. This is still a big ask of educators, but I am hoping my research made it clear that the care put into the relationships with students and the intentionality put into content and activities is doing foundational discipline work at the forefront of the education experience which will help the educators throughout their careers.

It is also important to note that educators cannot remove their identities, positionalities and biases at the door of the classroom and enter the shared space with students as a completely neutral party. While I do not want to add extra pressure to educators (as I consider myself one and am familiar the concerns) I do want to highlight that educators have a responsibility to acknowledge their positionality in socio-political power dynamics and reflect on their identities if they wish to adequately serves students. Especially if they wish to work with SEL-

informed practices, immigrant and refugee students or any minority/marginalized group. This is currently far from reality, thus a part of my intention in conducting this research is to bring this to the attention of educators. Educators do have a responsibility to process and debrief their emotions regarding students and teaching, for the students and for themselves. Speaking from an SEL philosophy perspective, SEL intention is to help students achieve SEC and that will not be possible if educators do not have a level of SEC as well, realistically it is for the emotional wellness of the teacher as an individual as much as it is for the student. Requiring SEC and reflective work on biases or systemic power dynamics is not meant to blame educators or imply there is something inherently wrong with their positionality. Rather than pretending to be objective or neutral, anyone working with students (including administration) needs time to think, talk, write and reflect actively on their background and beliefs (Cressey, 2020, 204). These practices of reflexivity from a social-emotional perspective as well as from a cultural sensitivity perspective are meant to be empowering to the educators.

6. Implications and Limitations

Beginning with the literature it becomes evident that there is already an immense amount of research written around SEL and the immigrant and refugee demographic. The connection between the two is where research is lacking. This study begins to fill an existing gap in literature and contributes to the academic community that is exploring transformative SEL and CRT. This study also contributes to and supports already existing data that exposes mental health concerns in the immigrant and refugee demographic that provides possible solutions to the youth in the demographic specifically. Moreover, this research is comprised of newcomer youth from multiple cultural background and statuses rather than pertaining to a hyper specific circumstance and case. There is something to gain for future research to focus on specific groups and how they react to SEL considering unique aspects of cultural background. Future research may be aimed towards more specific groups and circumstances to determine if and how SEL would suite the groups needs.

This study was able to provide further insight into two academic topics, SEL and immigrant and refugee students, but not without its limitations. Though RISE was the perfect program to employ this study due to their protocol and means of education, recruitment of newcomer youth from other SEL programs, in other countries, and of more varying ages, would be sure to provide fruitful and diverse data to contribute to this research. Although attempts were made to find, contact and collaborate with an existing organization in Tampere, Finland, upon further investigation it seems due to lack of funding the program no longer existed. Finding an appropriate program that works with both SEL and the immigrant and refugee demographic was not easy and I did not find one somewhere in the Nordic region as I would have liked to. Within the immigrant and refugee youth demographic in Portland, OR all the participants had access to high school and the program RISE. Though this was completely necessary for the sake of the research question, I find that the voices of those without resources and in different scenarios could also be utilized to further explore my topic. Exploring how SEL could be utilized with groups struggling with access to resources, struggling to learn the host country's language or with serious academic concerns would be beneficial to the academic community in countries experiencing rising rates of migration and newcomer youth.

The original intention of this study was due to my own professional positionality and personal curiosity as a researcher, with the goal to move forward in SEL justly. The idea was sparked by my studies in Finland, in the Nordic region of Europe, but stemmed from my personal his-

tory and passion in the field of education. While I feel increased confidence in the ethics of SEL and content with my results, I find the expansion of this research necessary as well. This research is an adequate representation of the subject matter, however further exploration and expansion is necessary. This topic, considering the intentions and methodology, is not a matter of simply answering a question but expanding and reflecting on processes continuously in the classroom and academic environment. Countries with increasing migration rates and a goal of equitable education will require more research and data in the upcoming years. Education in the Nordics is celebrated for being equitable, universally accessible and child-centered, yet international education surveys have found immigrant students experiences lower academic achievement even though these countries have multicultural and intercultural policies and practices. (Kilpi-Jakonen, 2012, 167-168; Mikander et al., 2018, 41-43; Tørslev, 2018, 300). While education policy in these countries seeks to eliminate social inequality, there is a deficit of critical approach in traditional intercultural teacher education, current curriculum and diversity training, which support a ‘color-blindness’ style of approach that is politically outdated. (Dunlavy et al. 2021, 2-8; Paulsrud et al., 2020, 304; Rissanmen et al., 2016, 447). This is a part of the world that may benefit from further research in SEL with immigrant and refugee students, due to the already existing philosophies on teaching and changing migration rates.

As this study was conducted only in English, which was not any of the interview participants first language, facilitated by a white Western researcher and included a broad range of cultural backgrounds, there is the possibility that there is cultural nuances and intersections lost. If research was able to be conducted in multiple languages, with research of diverse backgrounds and cultural knowledge, there may be an increase in data and findings due to the researcher's ability to more deeply explore cultural specifics and depths to what the students reported. There may have been cultural, religious and language limitations to what the interview participants could report. Furthermore, newcomer students and participants who were younger than 18 or with lower levels of English than the ones I interviewed were unable to participate and lend their perspective, thus their voices and experiences are entirely missing. With furthering resources, abilities, participants and researchers involved, this research topic could be expanded upon in many different directions.

7. Ethics, Trustworthiness & Credibility

To establish trustworthiness and credibility I have presented my data collection, methodological steps, methods and data analysis transparently and consistently with many details as possible while protecting the identities of the students. The position I have taken in this research study is one of an advocate, being an advocate is to actively assist in the in the struggles of others and provide platforms which their struggles can be known and heard (Madison, 2012, 98). In regard to representation along the power spectrum, everyone is ‘vehicles and targets’, as advocates we aim to invoke responses and consequences to the mechanism of power (ibid). I am framing my perspectives from this position.

My previously established relationships and merit with the students interviewed helped ensure the students comfortability and trustworthiness with my research and interview process. The use of in-depth, semi-structured interview provided a space for the youth to share their opinions openly, easily and lent flexibility to the whole process in which the students could guide the conversation and choose what to talk about. Students received two Informed Consent forms explaining the implications and intentions of the research, their rights and a signature of their approval. I also explained in detail, clearly everything these forms said and what sensitive information could be discussed in the interviews, along with their right to withdrawal at any time. The steps of thematic analysis and repetition of such steps ensured that each component of data was taken into careful consideration. Finally, multiple means of ensuring trustworthiness were utilized, including consultation with the three RISE adult facilitators and project manager who ensure the safety of the students involved, continuous communicated and transparency with the non-profit IRCO and careful, intentional explanation of all implications of interview process with students in writing and described in conversation before, during and after the interviews.

To further ensure that my research was aligned with the ethical framework in which I framed my foundation and methodology, I followed Neville and Wilson’s suggestion of the ‘4 Ps of research with vulnerable populations’ for creating culturally safe research (2009, 72). The four Ps of research will vulnerable populations are Partnership, Participation, Protection and Power (Neville & Wilson, 2009, 73-76). Partnership and the ethics of engagement in research is the establishment of a relationships with the group being researched and needs of that group in relation to the research (Neville & Wilson, 2009, 73-74). I had pre-existing long standing relationships with the students, being their facilitator, mentor and tutors at RISE and friend

once they graduated and I would run into them in the community. I established the needs of the groups by disclosing my intentions, my research, making it clear participation in research was voluntary and giving them the options of in person, online, or withdrawal. I was also in daily communication with the program facilitators on days of observation to check-in and debrief anything that happened in the group or things we believe the group may need in the future. Participation involves members of the vulnerable group in the planning process and phases of the research (Neville & Wilson, 2009, 74-75). During my first couple of interviews, I asked my interview participants about their feelings regarding the interview questions and how to word the questions so that they would be more easily understood. I asked the students what questions they found more useful and if there were any questions they would take out or add to make the interview process better for them. Protection in research with the vulnerable population entails safeguarding the group from possible exploitation and the danger of research results affecting them personally (Neville & Wilson, 2009, 75). The names of students were never recorded by audio or text anywhere in my research process. Their demographic information, audio data, text notes data was captured and recorded under a number or eventual pseudonyms. There are also some natural safeguards of their information due to their demographic. For example, I recorded their country of origin and age as what they reported, not school administration or from a document. In this sense they report their country of origin which could be where they were born, where their family is originally from, or what country/culture they relate their identity to the most. School and US administration is most likely to record country they are arriving from or birthplace. The countries reported by students are likely to be different and thus provides another layer of anonymity and protection. Similar for age, many immigrant and refugee students arriving to the US may not know when they were born, may not have a birth certificate or may have intentionally lied about age upon arriving to the US so that they can go to school for longer. I recorded the age they reported to me, but it is undetermined which age they gave me as many of them have different ages used for different things. Which is applying yet another layer of protection. Power in research with vulnerable populations is the act of the research critically reflecting on their epistemological position and in choosing a methodology (Neville & Wilson, 2009, 76). This is when I originally chose to consider my options in addition to ethnography, examine the cultural critiques of ethnography as a methodology and how I ultimately chose Critical Ethnography. The intention behind choosing critical forms of methodology are in the hope that the research outcomes will be emancipatory in their intent.

8. Conclusion

Main points and findings presented in this research project illuminate the efforts of the adult educators to create adequate, culturally inclusive and emotionally sensitive content is key in addition to development of sincere, genuine care, respect and relationships with the students. The SEL activities should foster an overall sense of community and inclusiveness as well as provide opportunities for students to share their stories and opinions as well as to deepen the relationships between peers and students with adult facilitators. The existence of these positive relationships and multi-faceted activities will directly support the student in their self-exploration as well as help them academically do well due to the social and emotional support they are receiving.

Objectives of this research included representing both the students' perspectives as well as the adult facilitators perspectives and processes of running these groups. I achieved these objectives by exploring the students' opinions and thoughts via interviews and by collaborating and observing the adults' many roles and effectiveness in the programs functioning. My research will contribute to the already existing body of knowledge in the field and the specific category of transformative SEL. This research provides examples of many future avenues the research can take and expand upon, due to the many findings and how they can be further explored. This research is also significant because it has practical applications for educators seeking examples of SEL and CRT educational methods. Potential impacts are hopefully a growing interest in working with SEL and with immigrant and refugee students due to the importance globally as migration patterns rise and change. Future directions that may arise from this research can be demographic specific, curriculum specific and location specific, eliciting many options for further study.

Final thoughts on my part as the educator are regarding my personal feelings during the research process. While working with this group of students outside of this research project, I was lucky enough to feel the positive effects of our work every day, and in this space, I never doubted my impact on the students' lives in the educational space. I am grateful for my academic experiences bringing me to this research question and this research project, but my initial feelings upon starting the research were disappointment in myself. I am happy that I chose to explore this topic, to reflect on my perspectives, positionality and contributions in these students' lives, but I am disappointed in myself that I temporarily forgot what that was. When entering this research, I expected to find something negative, obvious cultural problems with

SEL or something structurally and systemically wrong with Westerners working with immigrants and refugees. Reflecting on that feeling, I am saddened that a part of me assumed I and other Westerners may not be inherently fit to work with this demographic. My time in academics had granted me a critical lens which is crucial for any scholar. However, upon starting the research process and receiving many positive accounts from the students it felt like I was being shaken back awake to a truth I once knew. The students were doing exactly what I sought from them, reporting based on their feelings, emotions and reflections of their experiences. But I had expected to somehow quantify these experiences from them and myself to label SEL as inherently 'good' or 'bad'. I began questioning how I ever forgot this positive feeling I had with the students every day when I worked with them, the gratitude and affirmations we exchanged daily. Did I take it for granted? Why did I assume I would find something profoundly negative enough to write a thesis about? This research has been crucially important to my personal and professional exploration of education but was also a reminder to avoid deeming emotions or feelings less valid in an intellectual, academic process.

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